



by Masterless Sword

Kingdom's Bloodline



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作为新世界的穿越者，李华第一切忌理工思维，二不是兵王杀手，三做假芯片系统

MX-EM

Kingdom's Bloodline

– Wang Guo Xue Mai –

- Volume 2 -

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Chapter 18

Father and King

Arc 2: Heir of the Kingdom

Dawn had arrived.

In Mindis Hall, the most important and most awkward reunion between father and son in the entire kingdom was unfolding.

Thales blankly stared at the robust noble before him who was his father.

He turned towards Gilbert and Yodel, a little terrified and helpless. However, both of them were quiet and had their heads lowered.

He then looked at the guards around the gallery hall, but the superiorly equipped soldiers had their gazes hidden behind their face-concealing helmets and stood motionless.

Then Kessel the Fifth's thick and sonorous voice rang beside his ears. "He looks like a skinny mud-monkey."

Indeed, Thales was not looking his best. His short, jet black hair was cut unevenly (Sinti's handiwork) and covered in dust. His tiny face was full of muddy prints and handprints. Although Asda the Mystic had used a mysterious method to stop his various large and small wounds from bleeding, the abrasions, cuts, and bruises left by the incidents in the Abandoned House and Red Street Market still riddled his body. On his dust-covered body, the child beggar costume made of sackcloth was also tattered and had a huge tear at his chest, almost revealing the burn there. Before entering Mindis Hall, he was even shivering in the cold wind.

"I believed that you two would not get it wrong." Kessel's voice rang in the gallery hall.

Thales raised his head again and looked at Kessel. His king, his father. But Kessel had already turned his head away and was not looking at him anymore.

A slight sense of discomfort surged in Thales' heart, but he immediately suppressed the uncomfortable feeling.

Kessel's thick and sonorous voice continued resounding, "Both of you know how important this matter is. Right now, the only people who know about this are the three of us. Of course, I will transfer Jines here, as he requires qualified care. That is why the people in the know would be the four of us. When Morat returns, I will personally talk to him about this.

"From now onwards, Mindis Hall shall be completely sealed off. To the world outside, spread the word that a royal treasure has gone missing and that I am extremely furious. We cannot take the risk of dispatching the royal guards as this would be too obvious. We must not let the enemy know of our next step.

"In the following month, his safety will be overseen by Jadestar family's private soldiers, consisting of fifty Swordsmen of Eradication. The level of defense might be considerably weaker due to the numbers, but these soldiers excel when it comes to loyalty and privacy. They can keep this secret. As long as they do not attract too much attention, it should be more than enough. Yodel, just to be on the safe side, stay guard here as well. Aida and the royal guards will be responsible for my safety this month."

Yodel did not say anything. He nodded his masked head slightly.

"Gilbert." Kessel still did not spare Thales even a single glance. He caressed the crystal on his scepter and spoke as he was immersed in his thoughts, his tone was full of authority. "Have you thought a reason for visiting Mindis Hall at dawn?"

"Of course, Your Majesty. The excuse is a ready-made one—there was a fiery battle between the gangs at the border of the Lower City Districts and the Western Districts. There were countless fatalities and a number of wounded. I hurried overnight to the imperial palace you were temporarily dwelling in to report this matter," Gilbert answered respectfully.

"This is not enough. I will be returning to the Renaissance Palace tomorrow. However, for the following month, you will need to visit this place frequently. A better reason is needed." King Kessel shook his head.

"What if I say that the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the royal treasure are too mysterious and that you ordered me to thoroughly investigate this

matter?"

"It is a little rough around the edges. But for one month's time, it is adequate." King Kessel contemplated for a while and nodded.

And then the King of Constellation finally placed his gaze on Thales, who was at a loss. His gaze was so sharp that Thales unknowingly took a step back, it did not feel at all like a father was looking at his son—the king looked like he did not care about Thales at all.

"One month's time, Gilbert, one month. Before his status is officially recognized, you are his personal tutor, and will be responsible for all matters concerning his education."

"Yes, Your Majesty, as you wish, I shall do my best," Gilbert answered respectfully.

Thales' heart sank.

Kessel assuredly tapped his scepter on the floor and contemplated for a moment. "You have to get him ready. He cannot appear in front of the entire kingdom, the Six Great Clans, and diplomatic envoys from other countries like this. From etiquette to disposition, and from knowledge to appearance, he needs to look presentable. What we need is a proper heir to the kingdom, not an abject street beggar."

'Street beggar?' Having heard this, Thales clenched his fists slightly.

"We will set Eckstedt Diplomat Group's welcome banquet as the goal. I hope that he will be able to make an appearance by then. This will not be easy, but I believe that you are able to carry it out well."

Thales' heart quivered slightly, but he silently listened to King Kessel's orders that left no room for doubt as the king planned his future step by step.

However, there seemed to be no space for Thales' own will in his future. Why was it like this? He had just escaped from that miserable place that he had once gritted his teeth and persevered through when he lived there. He had just escaped from that miserable place that he had once gritted his teeth and persevered through when he lived there. He still had many questions and uncertainties in his heart.

But this King Kessel that was standing in front of him did not seem to care about his

thoughts at all. He only announced his orders sentence by sentence and spoke about his own wishes. "No one has to know about his past, but there has to be a story. Gilbert, invent a story regarding his origin. As long as his bloodline can be confirmed—I will discuss with Liscia regarding this, it is not impossible to deal with the Gods—we need not fear gossip.

"Pick some of his peers out from the roster of nobles, along with educators and attendants for the heir. After he is recognized, all this will become the focus. Make sure to put all of these in the records in advance. I want to see the list of names before next week.

"And just to be safe, Gilbert, you have to reconfirm the clauses for royal succession in the 'Holy Constellation Constitution', along with precedents for cases like him in the Jade Star family. If there is anything that might be cause for dispute, it would not be too late for us to remedy it now."

Thales furrowed his brows and continued listening as they plotted his future and his life. He was like a marionette.

"As for his marriage contract, I have an idea. We will discuss it later, Eckstedt—"

At that moment, Gilbert spoke and cut the king off with a respectful expression.

"Your Majesty, there is still some time left as of right now." The middle-aged noble seemed to sense that something was amiss, but he tried his best to express his opinions. "If you need to spend time alone with this child, we can—"

However, Kessel swiftly waved his hand and stopped Gilbert mid-sentence.

At that moment, Thales saw that the eyelashes on the king's deep-set eyes fluttered. He felt as if a surge of strange emotions was emerging on Kessel's expression. Thales wanted to say something, but before the words reached the edge of his mouth, he swallowed it back.

'What... What should I say? What can I say? What should a seven-year-old child who is meeting his father for the first time say? Hey, father whom I just met, can I say something? Perhaps you should listen to my opinions instead of talking to yourself? Ah, it's too strange.'

Kessel looked like he intended to turn his head towards Thales, but then he turned

back abruptly. He rested both his hands on his scepter and gazed at the three portraits, not speaking for a long time.

Only at this moment did he seem to resemble a human being.

Kessel turned around after a long while. He did not look at anyone. However, the authoritative voice that belonged only to Constellation's King, Kessel the Fifth, rang once more, "In short, the duty bestowed upon the two of you is a very heavy one. Constellation has been heirless for twelve years. Only last week, whether by intention or not, Koshder mentioned in his letter about the succession system in Eckstedt. Both of you know how the Six Great Clans would react.

"His appearance is a variable, but also an unexpected bargaining chip and advantage for us... It is time to alter our plans, to make sure that we are one step ahead of our enemies. Ensure that his presence is utilized to the utmost."

Thales was stunned. Was this... his father?

'Variable. Bargaining chip. Advantage. Utilized to the... utmost? Are these what a father should say in front of a son he has never met?'

Thales heaved a sigh in his heart and lowered his head. 'So this is what it is... This feeling of not belonging... This doesn't feel like a reunion between father and son at all... He's more like a chess player who is naturally and nonchalantly moving a chess piece.'

Thales was obviously not the only one who felt this strangeness. Gilbert's countenance changed slightly, as though he wanted to say something. But in the end, he only lowered his head and heaved a small sigh at an angle the king could not see.

But there was still someone who cut the king off without regard for the atmosphere. "Your Majesty."

Thales turned his head around in surprise. It was the silent Yodel who had spoken.

The secret protector's expression behind the mask could not be seen, but his hoarse voice was extremely firm.

"He is first and foremost your kin—your son! And only then is he your heir. You cannot just ignore that he is your son."

Thales raised his head and saw that Kessel the Fifth heaved a long sigh before he closed his eyes.

"Yes, he is my son." With eyes still shut, the king held his scepter tightly and spoke drearily, "That is why I am here today. I entrust him to both of you. Remember—one month."

Yodel's gaze behind the mask's lenses froze for a moment. In the end, he lowered his head and did not speak anymore. A slight feeling of uncertainty and shock crept into Thales' heart.

The king nodded. He looked at Gilbert and Yodel, who both knelt on one knee. He then took one look at the dazed Thales with an indiscernible and complicated gaze, then walked away without hesitation.

Gilbert and Yodel slowly stood up.

The robust figure slowly walked down the stairs. The footsteps were heavy but authoritative. A king's authority.

'What? It ended... just like this?' Thales was stunned and watched in disbelief as his "father" left.

'This isn't right. This so-called father... He sired this body, didn't he?

'But why. Why does he seem so... emotionless? Also... the matters related to my future... Have they been decided just like that? I didn't even have a chance to speak... '

"Wait a moment!" Thales finally could not resist and shouted out loud. He was done being a powerless chess piece.

The robust figure paused for a moment and turned.

Gilbert looked at Thales in shock. Yodel's expression was still hidden behind the mask.

Watching the slowly turning king and enduring his sharp gaze, Thales suddenly felt as if there was a frog in his throat. But with great effort, he still opened his mouth and spoke.

"I... Although we have never met..." Stumbling on his words, he extended his hands

and swung it helplessly in front of his body while weighing his words. "But since you are my... I mean, since we are..."

The king held the stair railing and looked at Thales with an indescribably complicated gaze.

Thales shut his eyes tightly and opened it again, exhaling. "I think..." He pronounced the words with difficulty, his usual eloquence nowhere to be found.

'D*mn... What sort of attitude and words should I use when facing... this person, who is my father and the king at the same time?

'Adoration? Indifference? Stupefaction? Surprise? None of them seem right.'

Gilbert, who was beside him, extended his hand towards Thales as though he wanted to say something. But, in the end, he chose to remain silent.

Thales' breath quickened. He furrowed his brow and said, "I am actually a little perplexed. Perhaps, as my... you can give me some answers. After all, we are... related by blood. And you talked about so many things such as the heir, the kingdom, and the marriage contract, but I don't know anything. This might not be important for you, and you don't really care..."

Kessel the Fifth held on to his scepter tightly, not giving a single reply. His brows furrowed slowly.

Thales bit his lip. He felt the burn on his chest start to hurt again.

'D*mn it. Even my worst thesis report is less awkward than this.'

He swung his hands around lightly as he constructed his sentences. "But this is my future. If you have already made your decision... You should at least help me understand the situation a little. Besides, you said that no one needs to know about my past... But at least I want to, what I mean is... At the very least, I need to know about my own past.

"I really want to know what actually happened. And also, the path I will be walking on."

Kessel's gaze when he looked at Thales changed. It was no longer a scrutinizing,

judgmental and critical gaze. It was as though, for the first time, he recognized that Thales was a human being—and also his son.

Thales heaved a sigh. Whatever.

He opened his eyes and looked straight at his 'father'.

"Yes, I want to know everything about myself. I want to know my origins. Like... who my mother is, where I was born, and how I became the way I am now. Along with my identity, my future, and the choices I have... Answers like these... Instead of being an outsider, a chess piece, an object... That is if I really am your..." Thales gritted his teeth as he said that word, "son."

'Although your actions... are really unlike a normal father... Even though you are the king... '

Thales felt a little dizzy. The energy he expended tonight was too much for his seven-year-old body to bear.

The king finally looked him in the eye. His sky-blue irises shone brightly inside his deep-set eyes. At that moment, Kessel the Fifth's gaze was quite complicated and indecipherable. Thales could not interpret anything further from it.

"Child, what is your name?" The highest ruler in Constellation asked with his dignified voice.

Thales stared at Kessel. "Thales." He heard himself say, "My name is Thales."

'Only now does he think of asking for his son's name? My god.' Thales mentally shook his head.

"Thales, listen properly." Kessel narrowed his eyes, his tone cold. "You do not need to know about many things; you need not concern yourself with them either. Your path has already been decided, you just need to follow it."

'What?' At that moment, Thales felt a surge of coldness in his heart.

"If you still have any uncertainties, go ask Gilbert."

And then, Kessel the Fifth, the thirty-ninth Supreme King of Constellation, the

Southern Island, and the Western Desert... left Mindis Hall without looking back. His cloak disappeared from Thales' sight.

'Damn it.' Thales lowered his head and fixed his stare at the expensive black floor tiles with a tight frown.

'Is this really the sire of this body, and not an enemy?'

"Child, Thales." Gilbert, who was behind him, could not resist and silently tapped his shoulder. "Do not worry and think too much about it. His Majesty just has too much on his plate. He's actually—"

Before Gilbert could finish his sentence, Yodel suddenly walked forward and crouched down before Thales. He took out Thales' JC's dagger—which had somehow, at some point, gotten into his hands (Gilbert's expression changed. He touched his waist and knitted his brows)—and softly placed it in Thales' hands.

Thales snapped out of his thoughts and was slightly stunned.

The head behind the dark purple mask nodded slightly, and a hoarse voice slowly said, "Relax. You are his son, related by blood, bound together by fate. Nothing and no one can change this."

Thales sucked in a deep breath. 'They probably misunderstood. Did they think that I'm feeling disappointed because my 'father' ignored me?'

He kept his dagger and clenched his fists tightly, forcing out a smile.

"Don't worry." He suppressed the dissatisfaction in his heart and spoke plainly, "Thank you both."

Looking at Yodel who had cut his words off with his actions, Gilbert exhaled from his nose in displeasure. He, also, crouched down in front of Thales and spoke gently, "My young Sir Thales, you have experienced too much tonight. What you need now is rest, and perhaps treatment. Thales, please come with me. Yodel, I will look for you later. We need to talk."

Thales nodded and obediently followed Gilbert.

Yodel, who was left alone, raised his head and looked at a vase that was placed in the

corridor some distance away.

Using his sharp and frightening gaze, he observed that thin cracks that were barely noticeable had appeared on the vase.

Yodel furrowed his brows slightly behind his mask. He knew that before Thales had growled angrily... The vase was still in perfect condition.

Was it a coincidence?

Chapter 19

Anomaly and Rebirth

Wu Qiren was sitting in the classroom, his hands flying across the keyboard, speedily recording the discussion between two other students.

"Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturities such as laziness, and cowardice. When Kant described enlightenment, he emphasized that every single person possesses reason—a universal reason."

The other student answered with his pleasant voice, "Universal reason, which stems from enlightenment, has been unearthed and utilized to its maximum potential, which is why our current era was formed. Reason is supreme, limitless, eternal. It can give us unprecedented power—"

Having heard this, Wu Qiren removed his hands from the keyboard and furrowed his brows. Although he was usually gentle and polite, he directly cut the student off. He raised his head and spoke, "You, perhaps you have not read Foucault's view on the relationship between power and truth, and Heidegger's view on technology—"

However, he did not continue speaking, because when he saw the person sitting in front of him clearly, he was so shocked he could not speak.

Sitting opposite Wu Qiren... Was the Air Mystic Asda Sakern, with his long brown hair, blue shirt, and elegant demeanor.

The other party looked at him gently and spoke with a pleasant voice, "If a limitless power and an all-encompassing form of reasoning exists in this world, Thales, do you not... Do you not desire it?"

Thales jolted up from his bed.

In the dark, he held onto JC's dagger tightly, which was under his pillow. Drenched in cold sweat, he panted.

Thales turned over and jumped down from his bed. He only remembered where he

was when his bare feet touched the expensive, heated tiles, and his nasal cavity filled with pleasant, calming perfume.

The wounds on his chest and other body parts were itchy and painful under the bandages and plasters. This made him a lot more alert and calmed his breathing. He placed JC's dagger under his pillow once more.

Still badly shaken, he laid back down on the huge bed that was enough for twenty Thales-es to sleep in.

Thales was not used to the friction of the silk pajamas against his body. The bed had many springs at the core and its surface was soft and smooth, molding into Thales' framing submissively as he laid down on it. He was wrapped tightly in a Northland, goose-down blanket that was covered in silk. A smooth, silk pillow, imported from the Southern Coast, propped up his head and shoulders.

At that moment, Thales felt like something was squeezing him from top to bottom. It was as though the Air Mystic had wrapped him in a layer of air and was slowly compressing him.

Thales felt worried thinking about this. He pushed back the extremely light, smooth, and comfortable blanket before he stood on the ground again. Fumbling about, he found a corner, curled himself up, and lied down there. The rigid and hard floor, as well as the thick and solid walls, gave him a familiar sense of safety.

Having done this, Thales slowly exhaled and chuckled in resignation.

'I can't believe that this is happening.' He knocked on the solid floor tiles and let out a self-deprecating laugh. 'I miss the little guys in the sixth house so much. I hope Jala is taking good care of them.'

'Tomorrow, I have to talk to Gilbert about this. Even if he can't contact them directly, he could at least be able to keep an eye on them in secret.'

However, because of the fragment of memory he just recovered through his dream, his previously relaxed mood immediately became tense again.

Dreams are reflections of the subconscious. These memories of his past life were probably the most deeply hidden fragments within his subconscious. However, this time, even Asda Sakern appeared in his dreams.

"As expected, I still care a lot about what that lunatic said," Thales mumbled in the dark.

His short encounter with the Mystic a few hours ago flashed through his mind. The Mystic's actions, which were sometimes rational and sometimes completely random, his mysterious ability, and immortal body that was almost inhuman made him shiver.

And what he said: "Child. Looks like you do not know your own nature."

This sentence appeared again in his tired mind. Thales forced himself to get rid of additional and unnecessary emotions of worry and fear, then calmed down to analyze the Mystic's words.

'Based on what Asda meant, I am just like him, a Mys- No, just a person who has the potential to become a Mystic.

'Based on Asda's behavior, people with this kind of potential are quite rare. For me, this is a positive thing. But from what I can see currently, Mystics don't seem to be very welcome in this world.

'Asda's words were way too subjective, but if part of what Asda said about the so-called battle between Mystics and humans is true, Mystics would be a hated existence who cannot show their faces to the world.

'Also,' Thales thought worriedly, 'Asda's body. After his heart was pierced through, the wound shone with blue light. Is he really not a human anymore?

'And Yodel Cato. According to what he said, he must have arrived at the Abandoned House very early on, so he must have heard Asda's words.'

Thales clenched his fists.

'Does he also know that I 'lost control' in front of the Mystic? If Yodel knows, does it mean that Gilbert and King Kessel would know about it too? How would they look upon me?

'There are many other riddles. Such as my neurotic, unusually cold and extremely suspicious father, who is also a king; the fact that although I'm only seven years old, the Bloodline Lamp which is blessed with Divine Art, was from twelve years ago; my origin, surname, and significance towards the kingdom; why the news of my return is

treated with such secrecy, so much so that Gilbert and Yodel practically smuggled me back like thieves.

'And what's up with this world? A medieval way of life? A world where magic is common? Steampunk?'

Thales tapped his head. 'No, I can't figure anything out. My basic understanding of this world is still too little. I need a comprehensive course that starts from basic knowledge and would provide a child with rudimentary knowledge!'

Thales exhaled in resignation. His gaze immediately turned solemn.

Things like gaining rudimentary knowledge and learning can be done slowly. But, there was one matter that had to be resolved—the matter related to his life and body.

He recalled the Mystic's words again: "Child. Looks like you do not know your own nature...

"But never mind. Everyone will experience a first in losing control over themselves, and we all start from ignorance."

Thales clasped his hands in the dark and recalled the incidents where he 'lost control'.

'When Asda compressed me inside a layer of air using Mystic energy and prepared to squeeze me into a ball, my whole body boiled as if it was burning. I saw the energy ball in his hand. It must be the so-called 'air wall'. The energy ball became red and suddenly appeared in front of me. And then-

'Wait!'

Thales might have found a crucial point in the matter.

'Blood, and the burning sensation!'

Thales slowly sat up.

'Quide.'

The name flashed past his mind. He had experienced this blood-boiling sensation before. It was during the two consecutive times Quide abused him and brutally beat

him up. The similarity between those two incidents and his encounter with Asda was the fact that he bled!

Before this, Thales thought that the burning sensation within his body was due to the so-called 'Divine Art' that Gilbert mentioned, triggered by his blood falling onto the ground.

Now, it seemed like the incidents where he 'lost control' coincided with the occurrence of the burning sensation.

Thales was suddenly aware that he did not 'lose control' for the first time in front of Asda. In truth, he lost control for the first time in front of Quide.

'When Quide tried to kill Coria, that bastard should have been holding onto JC's dagger!

'How did that dagger suddenly appear in my hand? It was as strange as that energy ball suddenly appearing in front of me!

'Quide. Bleeding. Burning sensation. Dagger. Asda. Energy ball. Yodel and Gilbert. Bloodline Lamp.'

Thales shut his eyes. He realized that he could not sort out these disorderly elements.

'Too messy. Too chaotic.'

However, he was not discouraged. Instead, a surge of excitement that had not appeared within him since a long time ago rose in his heart.

'Classify the chaotic and complicated phenomena, postulate a hypothetical and theoretical framework, eliminate the irrelevant variables, and then sum up the causal logic. Lastly, verify the completeness of the theory.

'And then, there are the 'uncertainties' that can never be authenticated, the 'endogeneity' that can never be eliminated, and the 'quasi-experimental research' method as well as the 'counterfactual analysis' that will never be able to approach perfection.

'Isn't this one of those fascinating social science riddles that can never be explained perfectly? Was that not also once my favorite game?

'Besides, this time, what I'm facing isn't a multi-causal, social phenomenon that I can neither do anything about nor test and verify; it's a single problem happening to me, and I can test and verify it repeatedly!'

When Thales opened his eyes again in the dark, his irises were filled with the desire for a challenge. He tried to calm himself down and sort out the phenomena he was experiencing.

'There are too few samples, too many variables, and the mechanism is too simple. The overly complicated Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) cannot be used.

'I can just use the most basic Mill's Methods of induction. First of all, with 'bleeding' and 'losing control' as the keywords, select relevant cases and events.'

He slowly shut his eyes. The familiar feeling rushed back into his mind. All the disorderly elements and factors were speedily being configured within his consciousness.

'According to the purpose of research and the time sequence, establish different 'conditions' (not 'reasons') for each sample. See if the 'outcome' appears.

'Various incidents appeared past his mind in a flash. Eliminate incident samples with too many missing values, assemble each incident's condition and outcome and then differentiate them based on their level and type.'

A clear and organized table appeared in his mind. Four incident samples that could be observed and compared were arranged inside.

'Sample 1:

'Condition 1.1: Quide beat me up for the first time. Condition 1.2: Bleeding. Outcome 1: There was no anomaly.

'Sample 2:

'Condition 2.1: Quide beat me up for the second time and was about to kill Coria. Condition 2.2: Bleeding. Outcome 2: Lost control, and the dagger appeared in my hand out of thin air.

'Sample 3:

'Condition 3.1: Asda was about to kill me. Condition 3.2: Bleeding. Outcome 3: Lost control, and his energy ball appeared before me.

'Sample 4:

'Condition 4.1: I validated my bloodline in front of Yodel, Gilbert, and the lamp. Condition 4.2: Bleeding. Outcome 4: There was no anomaly.

'Enumeration over, comparison begins. Seek similarities and differences, categorize and conclude.'

The table was slowly simplified and normalized before they were merged together to form a passage of text.

Thales opened his eyes gently.

'Conclusion: When incidents that threaten life happen along with bleeding, there is a chance that the so-called "losing of control" would take place, and surrounding items or energy would be displaced to different extents.

'No, this conclusion is too tentative. Firstly, the sample size is still too small. Next, certain disturbance variables cannot be eliminated. Also, "incidents that threaten life" seem too far-fetched. It might be a false mechanism. Could it be that the incidents that threaten life triggered something else, and thus was the actual trigger to the loss of control?

'I must also think of a way to factor the lamp in.

'Lastly, I have only managed to prove that those incidents are correlated. The grounds for causal reasoning are still inadequate.

'No matter what... ' Thales turned over and laid down... 'When it comes to 'losing control', there is at least a tentative conclusion now.

'As for the next step for the direction of the research-'

Thales exhaled, suddenly feeling the fatigue in his mind. 'As expected... He furiously rubbed his temples. It's still too much of a burden for a seven-year-old brain to think about these things, huh?'

However, he immediately realized with surprise that something was wrong.

'All those logical inductions and deductions, they should have at least been jotted down on a piece of draft paper with a pen. But, in actuality, the entire process of implementation for this analysis... had only taken a split second in my mind?'

After a long while, Thales tapped the floor, feeling the pain in his head.

'As expected, from having Mystic abilities and 'losing control', to possessing the so-called bloodline, and this monstrous capacity for cognitive processes... This body and this brain... are abnormal.'

As Thales contemplated, he slowly drifted off into dreamland.

.....

When Thales was woken up politely by Gilbert, he realized that he was back on the bed and was wrapped up neatly in the blanket.

"My esteemed young Sir Thales, good day." Gilbert respectfully drew open the drapes. The afternoon sun shone in through the huge window, brightening up the luxurious and comfortable room.

Magnificent heated tiles with pictures of stars on them, a reclining sofa made of monitor lizard skin, a spacious four-poster bed made of copper, a huge Crystal Drop chandelier hanging from the roof, and a veneer fireplace—all those appeared before Thales' eyes.

All of which constantly reminded him that his life was different now.

It was hard to believe that just a few hours ago, he was a little child beggar in a gang whose life hung on a thread and who lived in constant danger. And now, he was the blood relative of the highest ruler in all of Constellation.

"It is two in the afternoon right now, I sincerely suggest that you wake up and take your meal now as it will effectively boost your body's recovery and maintenance." The middle-aged noble was speaking with a neutral tone, but Thales could sense that he was urging him.

"Also," Gilbert blinked amicably and spoke with a smile, "due to His Majesty's wishes,

our first lesson shall begin in the afternoon. I believe that you must have many questions, and I am very willing to answer them for you."

Thales rubbed his eyes and yawned while he stripped the uncomfortable silk pajamas. He fumbled about as he simply put on the informal attire nobles usually wore, which Gilbert had prepared for him.

"Great," he squinted and said lazily, "I love having lessons."

'And... ' Thales shut his eyes and thought silently. 'I was having a good sleep. Who got me off the floor and placed me on the bed again?'

"Sir Thales, you must like these pants very much."

"What?"

"Because you are putting them over your head."

"What? What sort of pants look like these?"

"Sir Thales, you look like you harbor a special affection for this buttoned coat too."

"Oh, this is a coat to be worn outside?"

"Sir Thales, I think you would need the belt to your left."

"Ah, thank you. I was wondering why it kept falling down."

After a long time...

"Sir Gilbert."

"Yes?"

"Please put these damn clothes on for me."

"Gladly, my esteemed young Sir Thales."

Chapter 20

Red Constellation (One)

Conspiracies and tricks. Evil and ugliness. A lot of them are born in the secret chambers lurking in the dark.

However, conspiracies can also be forged under daylight.

Such as now.

As winter approached, on the afternoon of the sixteenth of November. In a spacious stud farm, an old noble who was bulky and fat stood under a parasol wearing a thick mink cape. His head was lowered and he was frowning.

While watching a few horse trainers train the horses, he struggled to listen to what another noble to his left was saying. After a long while, he slowly heaved a sigh and, watching a disobedient horse some distance away, he puckered his lips.

"What sort of royal treasure has disappeared that it warrants our esteemed king to seal off Mindis Hall for an indefinite period? What a pity. I was planning to visit Mindis Hall next week to take a look at Master Kolven's posthumous work."

The noble next to him was younger and slimmer with a relaxed expression. He raised up the aloeswood pipe in his hand with effortless ease and took a deep drag.

"Also, Gilbert rushed overnight to Mindis Hall to report to His Majesty regarding the situation for the gang battle in the Lower City Districts," he said cheerfully while blowing smoke rings.

"Really? Since when does our esteemed Iron Fist King care about the fate of the outcasts in the Lower City Districts? If only His Majesty treated his people with half the benevolence and kindness of our late King Aydi—" The bulky noble touched his thighs with deep hatred and resentment as the incorrigible horse fell on its forehooves.

"—why do we need to meet at a stud farm?"

"The king's faction is definitely planning something. I can guarantee that it is certainly not a trivial matter—it is perhaps something that can turn the tables over in one stroke." The pipe-puffing young noble's gaze was radiating with energy.

"Mindis Hall is such a good place. Having lost a royal treasure—hopefully it is not Master Kolven's artwork—the security there must have been tightened." The old noble had suddenly blurted out something that made no sense.

However, the young noble nodded in understanding. "I also have news that Gilbert was ordered to investigate the truth behind the burglary, and as of late, he will be visiting Mindis Hall frequently. With that man around, even the White Eagle can't do anything. We can probe, but we shouldn't go too far. We have to use other methods to disrupt their plans."

The young noble inhaled another mouthful of top-grade Fisola Tobacco, of which only six hundred pounds was produced each year. He reveled in it for a moment and blew a perfect smoke ring.

"Next month, the Eckstedt Diplomat Group will be arriving at our kingdom's territory." At that moment, the old noble's face showed sincere worry. "Ha... it had not been easy for Constellation and Eckstedt to achieve a state of peace."

"That is true." Compared to his elder, the young noble could not retain his composure. His aggression, will, and spirit showed. "If any accident happens to the diplomat group within our kingdom's territory, Our Majesty will probably be forced to act passively when he faces pressure from within and outside the kingdom."

"If Our Majesty does not handle it appropriately..." The old noble watched as the horse from a distance away got up. He exhaled in relief, drank a mouthful of tea and spoke in resignation, "Ha... as expected, a kingdom like ours where the crown is inherited is a backward one."

The two of them were silent for a while.

The old noble shifted his body and asked distractedly, "What is going on in the Western District?"

"Do not ask me, Sir. You know that I hate Mystics the most."

"Alright. Then shall we talk about the Black Street Brotherhood?"

"Those people still refuse to reveal anything." The young noble's countenance suddenly became displeased. "After being around for only around ten years, they already have such a big ego. Presumably, their confidence in their backer, whoever it is, is higher than their confidence in our 'New Star'."

"Do not look down on young people." The old man cracked a smile in resignation. His eyes shone with sagacity and sharpness. "When children do terrifying things—that is true horror."

.....

Compared to the quick glances he threw the day before during the previous night and at dawn, Mindis Hall now looked bigger, more magnificent and, of course, emptier in the afternoon in Thales' eyes.

The ground floor housed a large parlor, a large banquet hall, and an open-air garden. The place was also equipped with a large-scale scullery and basement storehouse. There was even a depository for military equipment.

Apart from the open-air balcony, where a full view of the outdoor garden can be seen ("Due to considerations for your safety, I do not recommend that you appear on the balcony or outdoors within the month."—Gilbert), the huge first floor had three large-scale rooms with different functions—the noble banquet hall, the assembly hall, and the games room. There were also rooms of various sizes.

The corridors, exits, and entrances of the ground floor and first floor were full of dignified, armored guards, all of them positioned themselves while following the protocol of one sentry every ten steps. Their faces were hidden behind full-face helmets and every single one of them looked as intimidating as large statues ("Although they are Swordsmen of Eradication that belong privately to the Jadestar family, I still do not recommend that you poke their stomachs, young Sir Thales."—Gilbert). However, from a distance, Mindis Hall still looked eerily quiet and empty.

Thales' living room, bedroom, dining room, and study room—where lessons were conducted—were on the second floor. The second floor was only accessible from the first floor, through a crowded fleet of stairs. Moreover, eight fully equipped Swordsmen of Eradication were guarding the place at full attention, changing shifts every six hours. As for the area outside the windows and the roof, he heard that there were also guards that were stationed outdoors ("With Yodel around, you do not need

to worry about threats from beyond the window."–Gilbert).

Every single dish, from broccoli and bread, to beef and plain water, was taken from the strictly-guarded scullery and the basement storehouse where they were prepared ("Pardon me, I have no way of ensuring their freshness."–Gilbert). From cooking to delivery, the dishes had to go through stringent poison treatment, prelibation, and poison-testing procedures.

'These safety and security measures are really beyond human imagination. It seems that I'm a lot more important than I thought I was. Should I say something like, "As expected of the ruling class"?

'I wonder if Jala is able to sneak in with her skills. What about a Mystic? Speaking of such... '

"No, this is out of the question. Pardon me for refusing, young Sir."

Thales raised his head to look at Gilbert, giving him a questioning look.

"So far, everything related to you is kept confidential." Gilbert shook his head firmly, "Pardon me for speaking bluntly. We have already sealed off Mindis Hall. Our communication with the outside world is limited to a few trusted oath keepers. Under this situation, for the royal family to suddenly dispatch troops to a gang in the Lower City District in search of three child beggars in hiding, whether it is to monitor or to assist them, would be extremely detrimental to both parties."

"Although the gang is nothing to us, actions that are too flashy would alert our true enemies and provide them with an opportunity to seize our weakness. Do not look down on the capabilities of those with malicious intentions. With the slightest clue, they would be able to reel silk from cocoons and find the source." He said in a deep voice, "To help your old friends, we have to at least wait for the... right opportunity."

Thales heaved a sigh and frowned, eating the last mouthful of buttered bread—it was sweet and greasy. He immediately took his cup and drank a mouthful of red tea.

'At least the food is much better.'

"If you are satisfied with the afternoon tea..." With impeccable etiquette, Gilbert took the teacup from the frantic Thales and bowed slightly. He continued, "...we shall begin our afternoon lessons."

In truth, while maintaining a smile, Gilbert muttered in his mind, 'Perhaps we should begin with dining etiquette?'

"How about Yodel? Where is he?"

"As a competent protector, he would naturally be on guard somewhere nearby."

Thales resisted the instinctive urge to look around. Once he knew that Yodel was nearby, he somehow felt a lot more at ease.

And so Thales tugged the bow tie on his neck that was making him uncomfortable and followed the slightly frowning Gilbert into the study.

"First of all, Thales, I spoke to Yodel yesterday."

Gilbert watched as Thales positioned himself on a leather chair and curiously looked around at the decorations of the study, especially the three filled bookshelves.

"You are an extraordinary child. I can see that—based on Yodel's assessment, and the few hours I spent with you since we met each other"

'Here it is.' Thales maintained a curious expression, but he raised his guard.

"However, this goes without saying—the heir of Constellation is naturally special." Gilbert placed his hands behind his back and slowly walked towards the study table, which was carved with the symbol of the nine-pointed star.

At that moment, his grayish-white sideburns made him look especially solemn.

"I believe that since Fate has returned you to Constellation, she must have her own arrangements."

Thales looked at the middle-aged noble and said nothing.

"I vaguely know about your past. The days on the streets must have been difficult. But please forget about them."

Gilbert picked up the book that been placed a long time ago on the black, aloeswood study table. He turned around and said gravely, "You will have a new identity, a new life, and even a new name. However, the most important thing would be the future you

have to face and the burden that you will have to shoulder from this future."

Gilbert's piercing gaze looked into Thales' gray irises.

'Forget the past.' Thales meditated to himself. He looked at Gilbert's sharp eyes and nodded with a solemn expression.

'How is that possible...?' Thales mocked in his heart.

"I understand. So," Thales weighed his words and spoke slowly, "what does the 'me' right now need to know about myself and my past?"

Gilbert's expression did not change, but in his heart, he nodded slightly. 'Anxiousness, fear, helplessness, all the emotions that should be felt by a seven-year-old child under this kind of situation, are absent from this child.

'There is only calmness and caution. Even his excitement is minimal. He is indeed extraordinary.

'Is it due to the tough trials and tribulations he faced in the Brotherhood? Yodel refused to explain in detail, but the assassin was full of praises for this child. However, does being in a gang in the Lower City District really give someone this kind of experience? Or should I say that the royal bloodline that descended from the ancient empires, with almost three thousand years of history, is indeed extraordinary?

'Or maybe, his other half... '

Having thought of this, Gilbert furrowed his brows a little, but the competent noble still bowed slightly.

"My esteemed young Sir Thales, please allow me to regard you as such for the moment. You are seven years old this year. On the twenty-fifth of July in the year 665, you were born in Mahn Manor, which is on the outskirts of Constellation's capital city, Eternal Star city."

"Your biological mother is a noble lady, whose name shall not be disclosed because it is not convenient for us to do so. She passed away from excessive bleeding while giving birth to you. Before taking her last breath, she named you Thales, after the brightest star in the sky."

Thales furrowed his brows slightly.

"You grew up under the secret care of the Jadestar family in Mahn Manor. I, and another female official visited you occasionally. During that period, you grew up as a child adopted by Lord Mahn while he was hunting outside and did not know about your true identity.

"Last year in December, Lord Mahn died in battle on the border of the Western Deserts. Due to his lack of an heir, his assets and territories were retrieved by the monarch. At the same time, I brought you back to Mindis Hall, which is in the Twilight District."

Thales kept quiet and listened to the entire narration.

"And next month," Gilbert held the book in his hand tightly, "As the King, Kessel the Fifth's, illegitimate child, a member of the Constellation royal family, and the only surviving blood relative of the Jadestar family, you will be declaring your birthright. Then the royal family, Sunset Temple, and the upper house of Constellation will jointly recognize you as—"

Gilbert's expression was imposing and solemn. There were also slight hints of worry and sadness. "...the heir of Constellation's Supreme King."

After a long time, Thales exhaled lightly. 'Looks like it's way more complicated than what I imagined.'

"I get it. There are some parts that I'm still unclear about, but I will remember it firmly. I used to be Thales who grew up in Mahn Manor, and was also Lord Mahn's adopted child." Thales' eyes sparkled, and he propped up his hands before placing his chin on them.

His thoughts were being configured speedily. He grouped the information he already had and what Gilbert said, into various elements and converted them into valid information.

Gilbert nodded and sat on a leather chair opposite Thales. "For the remaining parts, I will provide the details for you to memorize and familiarize yourself with."

"Right now, this is your only task, and also all that you need to know."

'As expected, although he respects me very much... Deep down, he feels that there's no

need to tell a seven-year-old child so much.' Thales' eyes sparkled.

"Next, I need to know your basics when it comes to—"

As Gilbert was contemplating the lesson he should provide Thales with next, of whether he should start with basic etiquette or languages, the heir of Constellation suddenly opened his mouth and interrupted him.

"So, we have decided on a common excuse for the people outside." Thales, who was curling up in the leather chair raised his chin from his hands. His gaze shone with bright light. "It should be time to tell me the truth, along with the predicament the king is in, and our common enemies and allies, whether public or those lying in the dark."

Gilbert was slightly stunned.

"For example, my birth mother's identity and why her identity is... not to be divulged; Constellation's difficult current state of affairs, especially the series of problems brought about by the royal succession;

"Perhaps you should tell me all of the above in detail so that I won't harbor any uncertainties when it comes to my future lessons. I will also be able to choose and prioritize the knowledge I need to learn. I believe that for the sake of Constellation, and also your king, this is the best choice."

As soon as he finished speaking, the middle-aged noble's jaw dropped slightly. He looked at Thales in surprise.

'Did Yodel talk to him about all this? No, it's impossible.'

Thales retracted his hands. With a calm expression, he coolly but determinedly waited for Gilbert's answer. At that moment, Gilbert felt like he was looking at the young Kessel Aydi Jadestar.

At that time, Prince Kessel's eyes had been sparkling like stars. The warm rays of light in his eyes had not yet become the bone-chilling northern wind.

Gilbert only remained dazed for a moment before he immediately snapped out of his stupor and heaved a small sigh. 'An extraordinary child, huh?'

Beginning from that moment, the middle-aged noble answered his young master with true reverence and respect.

"I understand. I will explain them to you immediately. In order to save up whatever limited time we have, if you have any other queries, you may also raise them now."

Thales frowned slightly. "Very well." He propped up his body from the comfortable leather chair that he was unaccustomed to. "Then I will be more straightforward."

Thales activated the extraordinary cognitive capacity of his mind and pulled up all the relevant information. Just like how he used to do when organizing relevant literature for his research, he summed up all the key points.

"You mentioned before that the Bloodline Lamp was blessed with Divine Art twelve years ago, but I am only seven years old. Why did your people prepare the tools to search for blood relatives from twelve years ago? I believe that this is related to my birth mother, whose identity cannot be divulged. Who is she? Why did she leave me with the gang after giving birth to me seven years ago? These questions can be categorized under 'Where am I from'.

"And, Kessel, my father, is still in the prime of his life. What is the reason for Constellation not having an heir for twelve years? Why has all hope for an heir been placed on an illegitimate child of unknown origin? There is something wrong with my father's attitude towards me. If it's not a problem with his personal attitude, then I'll have to ask. What is his relationship with my mother? Why is my identity such a secret? These questions can be categorized under 'Who am I'.

"Lastly, what does my existence mean to Constellation? Without an heir, what kind of problems would Constellation face? Who are our enemies, and who are our allies? According to what you said, Sunset Temple plays an important role in the matters related to me. How is this related to them? If I am acknowledged, or even if I just make a public appearance in the kingdom, what would be the state of affairs we would have to face? As an illegitimate son, what are my rights? As an heir, what would I be inheriting? These questions can be categorized under 'Where am I headed to in my future'.

"Where am I from, who am I, and where am I headed to in my future. Sir Gilbert, please answer these three queries for me."

It was as though time stopped at that moment. Gilbert stared hard at the boy before him.

From out of nowhere, a rush of surprise and fear appeared in his heart.

'Late kings from ancient ages, late kings of Constellation.' He sighed from the bottom of his heart. 'Is this boy your descendant? What kind of power is hidden within your bloodline?!'

After a long moment, the middle-aged noble uttered a sentence with slight difficulty, "Sir Thales." He exhaled and organized his words. "You are definitely unlike a seven-year-old child."

Thales immediately realized that what he had just said was inappropriate, but there was already no way for him to back down.

'Whatever, being a child prodigy who is familiar with the ways of the world is definitely better than being a clueless puppet.'

"More than one person had said this before; if you want to get into my good books, you will have to word it more creatively, Mr. Gilbert." To mitigate Gilbert's expression, Thales answered with a rare show of humor and cracked a smile.

Gilbert did not reply. He just cast Thales a deep look, not averting his gaze for a long time.

Just as Thales wondered whether time had stopped, the middle-aged noble, who was as still as a statue, suddenly opened his mouth and began to answer his queries. "My esteemed Sir Thales, firstly, where you are from... Everything began twelve years ago."

"In the March of the year 660, although the late King Aydi II was already of old age, he was still king. His reign was long-standing and steady, the people knew him as the 'King of Eternal Rule'.

"However, due to an increasingly fierce rebellion, the whole of Constellation sunk into an unprecedented turmoil. It even affected the entire Western Peninsula.

"War, disaster, famine—those were the issues of that year. A lot of people referred to that year as 'Bloody Year'. Amidst the chaos and bloodshed, King Aydi was murdered. Almost the entire Jadestar royal family was slaughtered.

"Among all the legitimate members of the royal family, only his fifth son, Prince Kessel Jadestar survived. At that time, he was thirty-five years old. In the end, he was crowned as king. That was your father, Kessel the Fifth, known as the 'Iron Hand King' among the people."

Chapter 21

Red Constellation (Two)

'Taurus. Help me.'

[I am incapable.]

'I know you can do it. You are the strongest amongst all of us. I also know that this seal is not completely... '

[Why?]

'This is because you must help me. I need to be restored to my body immediately and return to Constellation.'

[I regret I cannot comply.]

'Taurus. You are not the will of the world nor are you one of those stupid Gods. Why do you want to be stubborn like them?'

[Ignorant.]

'Please, Taurus! I met a child. He may be the only newborn Mystic in a thousand years.'

[What does that have to do with me?]

'Why can you not comprehend? We are only fourteen Mystics. With him and we would have fifteen Mystics! We are all one unified entity!'

[Unified entity?]

'Believe me Taurus. We all coexist and live with one another even if our journeys are different.'

[Do you remember Blood Spike Hellen?]

'That is different. I will never admit them as one of us. They betrayed us!'

[Everyone has a choice. That's what it was.]

'We are not mankind!'

[Choices has nothing to do with race.]

'Then I have made a choice! I choose to be a Mystic! Don't you want to see us stand freely on top of the world?'

[I had a choice, that's all.]

'Taurus! That child needs guidance! Otherwise, sooner or later he would... '

[That is fate.]

'Third Grade Apprentice of Soul Tower, Taurus Mill! Do not forget! You are the one that killed the people of the mountains and ocean! You are the one that started the war! You are our first role model! If it was not because of you, everything else would not have happened!'

[...]

'Taurus. Help me.'

[...]

'Help me.'

...

"Wait!" Thales raised his hand and interrupted Gilbert's slightly sorrowful words.

"The Jadestar's family bloodlines were slaughtered until almost none were left? Who did this?"

Gilbert simply gave him a sad look. Thales narrowed his eyes. There were already some problems in the earlier words.

"You said that my grandfather, Aydi II, had a long and stable rule and was known as King of Eternal Rule? Then what happened during the rebellion in the Bloody Year? Great order brought an armed rebellion? That is totally illogical."

Thales looked at Gilbert. However, Gilbert simply patted the book once with his hand and frowned slightly.

The gray-haired middle-aged noble calmly said, "There are many reasons for the Bloody Year. It is also very complicated. Some information is even limited only to high-ranking officials. You will know this in future lessons. When you become the official heir, with the right to access all these secrets, It would not be too late to know then."

"Right now, I can only tell you that His Majesty has already taken revenge on all the enemies that he could. The hidden dangers have already been basically resolved. As for the remaining enemies, revenge either cannot be carried out or is impossible."

Thales narrowed his eyes. 'Basically resolved?'

He had a hunch that the incident a dozen years ago was extremely important to him.

Gilbert continued his recounting with compassion and grief.

"During that year, the five central territories encountered a lot of natural disasters and crop failures. Six cities in southwest started an armed rebellion. The army that was supposed to stop the rebellion had a mutiny. The Barren Bone tribe also rebelled and the Eckstedt Empire started an invasion. The north was in a state of emergency. There was also a naval blockade and the supplies from the south was cut off. The rebels even surrounded the Eternal Star City for some time. The nobles in the city even united to force the King to abdicate. Everything happened very suddenly."

"Bad news was reported in the court every day such as the fall of a territory, the invasion of an enemy, the defeat of the army, allies breaking treaties, a noble was killed or there was a brutal massacre. Everyone is alarmed and prayed for a better tomorrow but received worse news the next day."

"The people in the city were in rags as they struggled to survive under the pressure of the army. Those not in the army were hardly able to get any food. Nobles below the rank of Earl were like beggars. Their previous power was as good as dung. Those that had gold were also unable to trade for food."

"Thieves, robbers, and mobs emerged endlessly. Even the army could not suppress them. The number of people in the army that died from battle, illness or starvation also increased as the day goes by. It was to the extent that the city moat was blocked with the pile-up of corpses. The people outside the kingdom had it worse. Many are reduced to refugees or mobs. They drifted with the wind and have nothing to rely on. Robbers roamed and other criminals run rampant."

"Many lords were hanged in their own fields. Some officials were even flayed in the kingdom offices. It was impossible to make a living without weapons. I heard from a messenger rider that piles of bodies lay every few steps of the road in the wild. It was impossible for a horse to gallop for half a minute. If there were less than five knights, refugees and mobs would swarm to attack."

"It was a tough year."

Gilbert looked out the window. His tone was calm but Thales could hear the desolation and resentment in his voice.

"The misfortune of the Jade Star Royal Family is amongst the biggest footnotes."

Thales did not speak. Gilbert sighed and continued.

"The King touched his white hair, worrying about the city every day. The lights from the candles in the conference room were never put out. Everyone from the Jadestar family such as the princes, the King's brothers, and others were assigned tasks like supervising the post-war work, winning over the nobles or even fight at the frontlines. That was until they were all mercilessly slaughtered."

"His Majesty, the former sovereign, was beheaded at the throne. The princesses were strangled in their sleep. The prince's concubines were burned to death in the castle, his descendants were killed by swaddling clothes. Even Her Highness the previous Empress was..."

"The heroic eldest prince took his sword and did not retreat. He died together with his Protector in front of the palace. The younger prince, Prince John, was the most unfortunate. Just as he was about to obtain victory in the Southwest Battlefield, he was killed by a shameful sneak attack from behind."

"One of the princes in the frontlines was shoved down from the highest room in the castle. Another was killed by poison during a noble's treaty banquet. One was forced

into a tight siege by Eckstedt and had no support for three full hours. The whole army was annihilated and he perished in battle. It was to the extent that when His Majesty Kessel was hurrying somewhere in the wilds, he was accosted by five hundred professional soldiers. At that time only Yodel was with him."

"Deaths and bloodshed covered the entire country. The upper levels were the court, the nobles, and the influential families. At the bottom were the knights, the businessmen, the laymen. They suffered heavy casualties. This was the most difficult page in the history of the Constellation.

Thales took a deep breath. "This country had experienced such a terrifying unrest before I transmigrated?"

Gilbert calmed down and spoke solemnly.

"This is why, please personally pursue the answer to the Bloody Year in the future. At the same time, please prepare yourself. The Bloody Year is only the tip of the iceberg. There was never any lack of bloodshed in the history of Constellation."

Thales nodded. He suppressed his curiosity and excitement, and doubts about the Bloody Year were attached with a number and filed into memory.

Gilbert looked at Thales' cautious expression and lightly nodded. He then turned around and continued speaking.

"Thales. The search for matters related to your bloodline started then. Your father, His Majesty Kessel may have survived but he had lost all of his relatives during that year. He also lost a pair of children, that is your older brother and older sister."

Among them, the one-year-old Luther Jadestar was swaddled to death. The assassin was spotted and in the chaos, he abducted the four-year-old Lydia Jadestar.

Here, Gilbert glanced at Thales with a complicated expression.

"Thales. Child." The middle-aged man slowly said, "At the beginning, that Lamp was not used to find you."

Thales lowered his head, looking at the wound on his hand.

'So, it was like this.'

"After the coronation of His Majesty, Liscia from the Sunset Temple personally performed a divine art that could find any living creature in the world that had His Majesty's bloodline. However, when we found Princess Lydia..."

"In short, His Majesty and the Jadestar Family had lost all of the legitimate successors, and the situation stayed that way for twelve years. During this period, no new bloodline was born to His Majesty. In the past twelve years, Constellation only had a supreme King. There were no princes or princesses. Even political marriages were chosen from the children of the six most influential families. This was until one day when that Bloodline Lamp lit up again."

The study room was silent for a long time.

Thales recalled the scene from the previous night. He needed to confirm one thing.

"During His Majesty's fifth or sixth year of administration..."

So, when Gilbert continued, Thales did not hesitate to interrupt the middle-aged noble.

"The plan to obliterate the Royal Family," Thales said softly. "Who was the most likely assailant?"

Gilbert closed his eyes for a moment. He then said, "It is the Charleton family and the Shadow Shield."

Thales silently sighed in his heart.

"One is a thousand-year-old inherited assassin family of the night. The other is an assassin organization that had rampaged in the darkness for a few hundred years. Together with some hidden hands, they plotted what is known as the Starfall rebellion plan. This was something the Secret Department of the kingdom later found out."

"Two secret Protectors of the former sovereign, Aydi the Second, were diverted by someone. As a result of the former sovereign's benevolence, the elite Royal Guards was dispatched along with the eldest prince to suppress the mob that had suddenly gathered in front of the palace. Although the forty guards from the city defense team were elites ranging from ordinary class to supra class masters, and there were enough to line up from the front of the gate to the palace at the back, the legendary assassin managed to kill them all along the way. They could not even hold him off for half a

minute. That was how Lordan Charleton cut off the previous king's head.

'That's right,' Thales silently thought. 'I have personally seen with my own eyes that knife skill that relentlessly presses forward and is unstoppable.'

"Several of His Highness' elder brothers, including His Highness the eldest prince, were assassinated by the Shadow Shield using a different strategy.

His Majesty's had a pair of children remaining in the court. They, together with the princes' concubine and the eldest princess, were killed by Bannette Charleton."

'Bannette. This name is really familiar.'

Thales huffed. 'This was the man Jala referred to as a stranger.'

He resisted the urge to feel JC's dagger. He also resisted the urge to immediately go back to the room and inquire from Yodel.

"Please continue." Thales immediately changed his mood and nodded his head. "Please talk about my part."

Gilbert spruced up his clothes because of excitement and also because his necktie was mispositioned. He then continued.

"I know a little bit about your biological mother. According to the words of your father, His Majesty Kessel, her name should be TherrenGirana¹. As for her family name... His Majesty never talked about her background. She is probably not a noble. From this name, I even suspect that she is a foreigner."

"But that is all. Nothing more. He did not tell me her age, when she met His Majesty, or even whether she is still alive."

Thales frowned. "I was sent to the Brotherhood at least seven years ago." Thales lowered his head and muttered. "That means, in the year 665, my mother met the King. Could you..."

However, at that moment, Gilbert shook his head.

"All this while, His Majesty has had many lovers, whether open or hidden. Some stayed with him for a month or two, some remained for as long as ten years. For more definite

information on their situation, only Yodel who always followed His Majesty around would know."

"However, all of them had nothing?" Thales asked in suspicion. "Only my mother whom I had not seen gave birth to me all of a sudden? And then the Lamp lit up when my blood touched the floor? Isn't this too suspicious?"

"My father, His Majesty the King, is also neither cold nor warm to his illegitimate child. He also does not seem to want to discuss with me about my mother. Are you sure I am their child?"

Gilbert frowned. "I am unable to and also cannot comment on His Majesty's actions."

"As for your mother, I can only say it is fate." The middle-aged man then looked uncomfortable as he added. "Besides that, I have to warn you that those ideas just now are not favorable to your future identity. I would remind you to not mention it again."

Gilbert's gaze was so harsh that Thales, who was sitting on a leather chair, shrank back.

"After all, the Bloodline Lamp from the divine powers of the Sunset Goddess is never wrong. His Majesty also insisted that that Lady TherrenGirana is your biological mother. So, keep this in mind and bury it in your heart. Maybe one day, His Majesty would answer this question for you."

The frosty expression and unassailable majesty of Kessel V flashed in his mind. Thales turned to another direction and rolled his eyes.

"This above answers the questions about where you came from and who you are." Gilbert's face was solemn.

"So, about where you are going..."

At this moment, a person had suddenly appeared in the study. He had silently fallen in right in front of them.

Gilbert's expression changed quickly. He instantly got up and used his foot to kick up a staff from the side. When the middle-aged noble caught the staff with his hands, he had steadfastly stopped right in front of Thales.

Thales then realized that the seemingly gentle and elegant middle-aged noble had quite good martial skills.

However, the middle-aged noble soon gave a sigh of relief and relaxed again together with Thales.

This was because the person that suddenly appeared was covered in a black hooded leotard and wore a dark purple mask.

"Hide."

The Supreme King His Majesty's Protector, Yodel Cato, said briefly in a hoarse voice.

"Some people are approaching here at high speed. Twenty!"

At this moment, Thales recalled Gilbert's words.

'There is no lack of bloodshed in the history of Constellation.'

Translator's Note:

1 TherrenGirana – The name was exactly in this manner, in English letters and without spacing in the RAWs. There was a note stating that this surname is not known by others.

Chapter 22

Secret Chamber Debriefing

'Bad luck strikes again so quickly after finally being able to get a good sleep?'

This thought crossed Thales' mind as he watched Gilbert calmly summon a few of the nearby Swordsmen of Eradication.

Yodel patted Thales' shoulder and shook his head. The expression behind his mask was not visible but Thales gave the silent Protector a 'smiley' in his mind.

The several Swordsmen of Eradication efficiently accepted their orders one by one. The originally empty and quiet Mindis Hall suddenly became lively. Fifty guards were dispatched under a unified command; moving methodically; sounds of commands and reports following one after another.

"Team 3 is going to the main entrance on the second and third floor."

"The deployment of troops is complete on both sides of the big hall!"

"Minor reinforcement on the roof of the hall is in place!"

Finally, Gilbert calmly gave a few more words to a Swordsman of Eradication that looked like the leader of the group. He then turned back to the study and carried Thales, who was peeping from the entrance of the study, back in.

As always, Yodel had already disappeared into thin air.

The middle-aged noble skillfully used his staff to pry open a plank behind the bookshelf. He then pulled back the bookshelf, revealing a secret chamber inside.

"Who is coming? Are they friends or foes?" Thales struggled to ask as Gilbert carried him in.

Gilbert lit up the Everlasting Lamp in the secret chamber and closed the door before asking in reply, "I suppose you wanted to ask who would choose to break into a well-

guarded estate of the Royal Family without warning at five in the evening?"

Gilbert had obviously no longer considered the Young Master an ordinary child. Thales gave a mocking smile. He already knew the answer to the question.

"Sorry. I would need to inconvenience you and have you wait here for a moment. Secrecy is of the utmost priority." Gilbert carefully drew open a curtain in the dim light revealing a fairly large iron plate with six different kinds of filter holes in it.

Thales curiously approached and saw six different places in the holes. The first floor of the Mindis Hall, the garden, the balcony on the second floor, the corridor at the second floor, the stairs at the third floor and also the patio at the third floor along with the outdoor roof of the hall could be seen.

"This is a surveillance mirror that uses mirror reflections to see all the critical areas in Mindis Hall." Gilbert smiled.

'Isn't... Isn't this a periscope?' Thales exclaimed to himself quietly.

"It is time for the first group to fight. The other guys are scattered."

Yodel's voice came from the void.

Thales immediately stood in front of one of the surveillance mirrors. This was at the garden on the first floor. There was a group of ten Swordsmen of Eradication from the Jadestar family. They had set up a formation on tacit understanding, swords and shields simultaneously attacking five differently dressed but completely covered intruders!

However, the intruders also seemed to be a team that was well coordinated team. Two of them nimbly held their scimitars, moving among the swords and shields, looking for an opportunity and to rescue a companion that fell into perilous situation. One used an arm shield and a flail. He kept striking out through the dense sword and shield formation, causing one of the guards to back away again and again. Another one used a half-sword and leaned forward to attempt to break through any opening in the formation. The last one also held a sword and shield. He seemed to be looking for an opening while leading the attack.

"Hired mercenaries and adventurers!" Gilbert took a glance at the periscope and said, "It appears to be a team that had cooperated and worked together for a long time.

They lived on wars or a lord's pay, working as hunters, soldiers, scouts, bodyguards or even assassins. There is nothing they would not do."

"I only arrived at Mindis Hall last night and there are already visitors?" Thales could not help but spat out.

"Is the Royal Family's majesty so cheap?"

"Mister Thales. I can assure you that the majesty of the Royal Family is by no means cheap. It is the exact opposite. This is what is strange about the Royal Family and is what made our enemies uneasy and afraid," Gilbert had lightly replied without sounding nervous or solemn. It was as though this was just a game.

"Enemies?" Thales turned his head and looked lost in thought.

"Yes. Do not worry about what is happening outside. The well-trained guards and Yodel would deal with everything. Now is also the best time to explain to you the third issue. Our enemies and our allies."

The middle-aged noble took a few steps back. He sat down on a dark colored sofa in the secret chamber. He then smiled and said, "Right now, your existence is our greatest secret that we want to keep from the people, especially to the nobles and lords of Constellation."

"The six big clans guarding the kingdom's territory and the thirteen distinguished families supporting the kingdom are core members of Constellation's Higher Parliament. Despite constant elimination and replacement it is contradictory. After all, they represent the ranking and influential nobles who, at the time of establishing the kingdom, vowed to govern Constellation together with the royal family."

'So, on the surface, this is a country where the King and the nobles rule together.' Thales took note of this in his heart. He needed more information.

"Were the nobles conferred territories in the kingdom? Do they have full control of their own respective territories?"

Gilbert nodded. "That is the initial source of power for the nobles since the time of the ancient Empire until now. It then developed into Constellation. Although many nobles had only their names and honor left, the ones that really hold the lifeline of the country are the six big clans and the thirteen distinguished families that still control large

territories."

"In accordance to their vows and the imperial order, they were ordered to defend the territory from all sides, pledge allegiance to the King and also pay taxes. The only territory the Royal Family could directly control is the Jadestar Family's Central Territory.

'A country that is not at all inferior to the Middle Ages. Its productive forces are not acceptable compared to the country I saw.'

At this very moment, Yodel's voice resounded in their ears again.

"An intruder is at the roof of the hall. He is currently being blocked by a guard."

Looking at the calm and collected Gilbert, Thales held back the desire to look at the scene in the surveillance mirror.

"These suzerains may have their own legal private armies but, most of the time, they would choose to hire outsiders to do odd jobs — especially some jobs that require staying clear of incrimination. This is especially true for the more powerful and dominant lords, such as our guests outside." Gilbert curved the corners of his mouth.

"Then what is the significance of Higher Parliament formed by the nobles and suzerain, and their authority?" Thales asked in a susceptible voice.

"The Higher Parliament is the product of the Virtuous Monarch Mindis the Third during his rule. After paying a heavy price during the Fourth Peninsular War, the Virtuous Monarch ordered those with influence such as the suzerains and nobles, the officials, the sacrifice priest, the traders and scholars to form the Higher Parliament and the Council of National Affairs. The former was a place to discuss official business exclusively for nobles. The latter was for the wealthy and influential in Constellation. With Mindis the Third's superb mediating skills, he had eliminated numerous conflicts and obstacles, assigned taxes, allocating resources, borrowing and repaying loans, allowing Constellation to proudly retain its precious resources from the war that devastated both countries..."

'A leader that utilized the kingdom's powers to deal with conflict and reach a compromise, crafting a platform for a consensus of the hierarchy'. Thales committed this to memory.

"Ignoring the Council of National Affairs for now. The Higher Parliament of Constellation had been preserved after the Virtuous King rule. Constellation's national affairs such as the King's orders and decrees are announced after a consensus had been reached by the nobles and the Supreme King. This gave rise to certain accepted conventions. In fact, after the formation of the Higher Parliament, the disagreements the King had, nobles infighting, pretentious obeisance had all reduced," Gilbert calmly said.

'The prototype of the representative system? No. It is impossible for it to be such an advanced thing. It is a bit like a hierarchical nation turning into a nation with absolutism. Feudal lords make up the structure of the system but it is moving towards a situation where local influence compete against central authority.'

"However, with the arrival of the Bloody Year, the conflicts between the six big clans and the thirteen distinguished families became more apparent. For thirteen days after former sovereign King Aydi II was murdered, the Constellation Capital under the jurisdiction of Constellation closed its gates and restrained its troops, until Kessel returned. They then reached an agreement and coronated the new King."

'An independent feudalistic parliament — the feudal lords uniting into an organization voicing against the monarch. These are all bad news for me.' Thales thought apprehensively.

'The parliamentary process can actually eliminate the Royal Family's role. This is a frightening power. When the time is right, it could become the storm that would overthrow the Royal Family.'

"But King Kessel did not have any heir in the past twelve years — the six big clans have already observed that."

Gilbert had a vigilant expression as he replied in a mysterious and complicated way.

"Forgive me for speaking bluntly. Our powerful neighbor in the north, which is the Hero Raikaru and the Hero Chara's nation, Eckstedt Kingdom, which is also known as 'Western Peninsula's Blade', adopts a system where the suzerains elect a King. The King is selected from among the qualified suzerains."

As he spoke, Yodel's hoarse voice appeared again.

"The enemy is attacking on the second floor! Team 3 and Team 4 are dealing with it.

There are also five more approaching the third floor."

This time, Thales did not make any action. Gilbert took a deep breath. He then pointed outside.

"Mister Thales. Right now, do you know where your enemies are?"

Thales remained silent.

'The Constellation's hereditary monarchy. A foreign country's elected monarchy. The six big clans and the thirteen distinguished families. '

'Enemies.'

Gilbert had pretty much given Thales the answer. However, Thales thought that the information was not sufficient. All kinds of possible conjectures flashed through his mind.

With his brain working quickly, he extracted valid elements as he continued to ask.

"If the King's bloodlines were cut off, the ones guarding the borders, the six big clans, would naturally be the first choices to inherit the crown. But does this also mean that the new King would inherit Jadestar's territory, assets, vassals and influence?

"If the six big clans were originally on equal footing, what would happen to Constellation when one suddenly becomes the Royal Family, expands rapidly and has orthodox supreme authority?

"The six big clans would become five big clans and one large beast. Would it be the same as during the rule of the previous royal family where everyone lives happily and peacefully together working towards a better tomorrow?"

Gilbert had been accustomed to being interrupted casually by the Young Master's words. However, this time the middle-aged noble quietly looked at him with a solemn expression.

Thales also looked back, his heart feeling heavier.

Thales' eyes glinted "In their joint efforts to secure the crown, they, the six big clans and thirteen distinguished families, also probably experienced a complicated and

headache-inducing bargaining and splitting of the spoils. At the very least, they would need to discuss about who gets the crown."

'In particular, after twelve years without an heir, most people would think that the end of the Jadestar bloodline is inevitable.'

Thales deeply exhaled.

'Looks like my survival would really affect the peace and unrest of this country.'

Suddenly, a thought flashed through his mind. Thales was stunned for a moment.

"Gilbert." The boy stood up from the couch and frowned. He then slowly asked, "During the Bloody Year, what roles did the suzerains play? I seemingly heard you say something about forced abdication? Then the disaster of the Royal Family..."

Gilbert breathed in deeply but had a complicated expression. Thales felt a chill in his heart.

'His Majesty was beheaded at the throne. The princesses were strangled in their sleep. The concubine was burned to death in the castle. The princes' descendants were swaddled to death. The eldest prince fought at the palace entrance and died. The King's younger brother met with a surprise attack on the battlefield and perished. Then there were four more princes. '

Thales' mouth hung open as he dumbfoundedly fell back onto the sofa.

This was the first time he felt that life was so complicated after transmigrating. This guy was never discouraged even during the most difficult days in the Brotherhood.

There was silence in the secret chamber for a long time. This was until Yodel's voice again sent a warning.

"This seems to be the last elite group. They are now fighting on the third floor."

However, Thales no longer cared. His mind drifted towards the possible employer of the intruders.

'Why was there such a useless Royal Family? Such that they were massacred by the suzerains under them? In that case, escaping from the Brotherhood would be suicide!'

'My so-called father can still sit and relax on the throne safely wearing his crown? Who or what gave him such confidence?'

'Is it a Mystic?'

'Wait. Is my supposed father still the King now? Why could he still stay as King until now? This clearly means... '

"No!" Thales sat up immediately at the next moment. His looked solemn, but he firmly rejected his own guess.

"First of all, the Bloody Year disaster starts from top to bottom, outside to inside. Assassinating a widely accepted and wise king does not help the conflict between the nobles."

"Second, Gilbert. You said before that the Higher Parliament held power independently for thirteen days after the assassination of the King. They had no King for thirteen days! Was it because they could not evenly divide the spoils or reach a unified decision that they then established a new King? Or was it because they were terrified? They were even unprepared to deal with the previous King's death"

"The key point is that my father, His Majesty Kessel, was crowned after an agreement had been reached by the High Parliament. This shows that he has enough support from the big clans. Could it be that someone foresaw that Prince Kessel who was in his prime of life would not have an heir for twelve years so that the suzerains needed to wait for twelve years to take the crown? What kind of Psionic ability would guarantee this?"

"Finally, the last doubtful point. You said that my father had already taken revenge on all those that he could. The hidden dangers were basically resolved. The rest that he did not take revenge on, he could not or it was impossible to do so. Perhaps the six big clans were indeed horrible. But if they were really behind the killings of the Royal Family, then His Majesty, the 'Iron Hand' Kessel would have taken action in the past twelve years?"

"And by nature, the Royal Family and the six big clans were alike. They were simply powerful nobles with a long history."

"If they were really prepared to take the throne, they would know they could not — at least they cannot scheme together and start this precedent. The best of the clans

massacring the royal family. What if one day they themselves rule the throne, how would they know history does not repeat itself?"

"The six big clans were not the ones that murdered the Royal Family! Am I right, Gilbert?"

Thales stubbornly stared at the middle-aged noble as though trying to dig something out of his head. He saw Gilbert step forward and give a lamenting smile.

Gilbert cleared his throat and nodded.

"Originally, my intention was to guide your train of thought to act as the enemy to the six big clans and that would be enough. However, it seems that I still underestimated you, my dear little Sir. I believe His Majesty would be proud that you could think of this. However, the suzerains that were at the palace were not completely guiltless. At the very least, during the slaughter of the Royal Family, they chose to sit aside and even happily watched it happen."

Gilbert's eyes looked sad. He hesitated for a while and then finally said, "There is definitely someone else behind the disaster of the Jadestar Royal Family but I myself am not clear about the real truth. Only His Majesty knows all the details. This is the tragedy of the Jadestar Family. It would be up to His Majesty to personally tell you about it."

Thales fixedly looked at Gilbert but then he huffed vigorously. It was as though a huge balloon was suddenly deflated. He threw himself onto the sofa behind him.

"Sheesh..." Thales could not be bothered with his etiquette as he rolled his eyes. "Just say it earlier!"

Gilbert laughed. He then bowed slightly. He tacitly approved the Young Master's words and thought to himself.

'Thales. This boy... perhaps Constellation may be different because of him. Although the Jadestar Royal Family's real enemy is not yet known, you are probably more terrifying than the so-called six big clans and thirteen distinguished families, but that is also unknown to them at the same time.'

Suddenly, a voice interrupted them.

"Everything is settled." Yodel's voice came again. "There are no survivors."

Gilbert's expression looked serious. He nodded and slowly stood up. "Very good."

Thales did not react and just stared.

'Everything is already over in the time needed to cook a meal?

'The stone had just fallen, but there wasn't even any noise?'

Gilbert stood beside the door of the secret chamber and gestured towards Thales, asking him to get out of the secret chamber. He said, "Do not worry, Mister Thales. They simply came to probe. These chores are better off being attended to by us. Your battlefield is a hundred times more perilous and vicious."

Chapter 23

Mortal Creatures

In the afternoon of the 16th of November at the Red Street Market.

The normally bustling and lively red-light streets were filled with the star blue uniforms of the lightly armored police. The dark blue-uniformed police personnel were at the wrecked buildings and by the road. They were coming and going, armed with stretchers, supplies and their notebooks.

"There is another one here!" A police officer waved his hand, telling another inquiring colleague who had just arrived. He dragged out a deformed body from a collapsed beam.

"This one is still breathing!" Another urgent cry came from a distance. The doctors and healers employed by the Town Hall including some temple priest volunteers hurried on ahead.

Lorbec Deira, the Class One Chief of the Western City Police Station, stood on a small hill of collapsed buildings. His feet stepped on the bloodstained building materials.

He had just sent away with a smile a few government officials from the Town Hall who were neatly and brightly dressed like those guys in a backstage. He had politely and even modestly listened to their stupid complains about how everything here was the police's responsibility and that the Town Hall is too busy serving the people to waste resources here.

Behind Lorbec was a large umbrella installed in an open space. This was a temporary morgue. At that moment, there were nearly a hundred corpses. Some of them were innocent civilians while some belonged to the underworld. There were many officials wearing masks, and walking around the corpses with pencils and papers. From time to time, a family member that had been searching for a long time, or had hurried here upon receiving the news, would recognize a corpse and give a heartbreaking cry.

Some of the family members, recognizing the uniform of the officials, would furiously rush over but were pulled away by the police and the soldiers who had been prepared

for it.

Lorbec lowered his head and gave a deep sigh.

Fortunately, it was winter and the flies have not yet gathered.

Lorbec trampled on a signboard that had broken into several pieces. When he saw that this was a chess club building his expression turned stiff and he walked in.

An exquisite swordsman piece fell out from the bloodstained ruins. Lorbec stopped and bent down slowly to pick up the piece before dusting away at it.

However, the blood on the piece had already clotted and could not be wiped away.

'These bastards.'

Lorbec's face was pale as he looked at the piece. The swordsman piece was coincidentally missing its sword arm. It was as though it broke from the sudden force.

The Chief turned to look at the side of the ruins. A man in a dark red coat was also looking at everything.

The man in red coat turned around and saw the dissatisfaction on the police's face.

"I will not approve!" Lorbec said resolutely.

"Are you sure?" The man in red coat showed his face. His bony face was covered with a beard. His tone was filled with ill intentions. "But this is requested by His Excellency and the Blood Bottle Gang."

"Nikolay! This is not what we originally agreed on! Even His Excellency would not agree to you bombing Red Street Market into ruins, and causing the loss of almost two hundred lives!" The police gritted his teeth to resist his anger as he spat out his words one at a time.

"And then you even want... their bodies?"

Lorbec felt as though his discontent was about to break through the sky.

However, the man named Nikolay replied with a cold face, as though he did not care.

"That is not correct. Aren't the destroyed buildings all only near the center? I also never knew that the Chief of Western City Police Station that had distanced himself while observing all evening also possessed a sense of justice and compassion. Besides that, didn't we also lose quite a lot of people?"

'Scum. You gangs fight your wars and you expect me to send my men to help you?' Lorbec thought angrily.

"These are the losses of the Blood Bottle Gang. It is also His Excellency's losses. Naturally, it also means your losses," Nikolay said.

'This scum. Why did the Western front banish him? They should have just cut off his head!' Lorbec cursed in his heart.

Nikolay then said in a bad tone, "So, this is for the benefit of His Excellency. It's just a few bodies, I am sure you would allow it?"

However, Lorbec did not give in to his persuasions. He marched towards Nikolay and quickly arrived right at Nikolay's nose. Lorbec's eyes were full of anger.

"I do not care how many of your Blood Bottle Gang members have died. I can accept His Excellency's orders but he did not mention that you would cause such a huge mess! This morning, everyone in the Kingdom has learned that you all played with explosives at Red Street! We even had meetings discussing the gang fights at the Western District!"

Nikolay's expression changed. He stepped forward, leaned towards Lorbec's forehead without flinching and stared at the Chief's eyes. With hate and fury, he said, "Then you must know that our anger is no less than yours! The Blood Bottle Gang would not be resigned to circumstances. We repay our blood debts!"

Lorbec who was provoked by Nikolay also responded angrily. "Stop talking about your trivial matters especially your gang of useless losers!" He then shouted, "The Blood Bottle Gang would not resign to circumstances? Do you believe that if I remove the police and the patrol teams, you scums would not even be able to leave the Red Street Market?!"

Nikolay frowned indignantly. The anger in his eyes became more and more vigorous. Lorbec glared back at him without backing off.

The surrounding patrolling members noticed what was going on and quietly approached.

Two Swordsmen of Termination captains had a cold expression as they held the hilt of the sword on their waists. Nikolay saw these soldiers from the corner of his eyes and his heart turned cold.

'This cop really has guts.'

At the same time, he noticed a few residents watching the excitement from the police cordon lines. A few of those who kept watch seemed to have ulterior motives. From time to time, they would disappear and then a few new guys would appear.

'Damn Brotherhood.'

The Red Street Market no longer belonged to the Blood Bottle Gang. He considered the police's strength and the Brotherhood's menace. Nikolay suppressed the resentment in his heart and took a step back.

'The Air Mystic has disappeared. At the very least, we must admit defeat until the Blood Mystic returns. Damn the chief cop and damn the chief noble.'

"I apologize for my statement, Lord Lorbec Deira." Nikolay stressed the word 'Lord' with a smile on his thin face. He then bowed down as though the anger before was artificial.

This was not the standard bow. "We really should not have bothered you. I will take my leave from this place and apologize to the Duke."

Nikolay laughed, turned away, and left... until the expected response came from behind him.

"Wait!"

Lorbec then clenched his fist tightly as he reminded himself that he should not have been impulsive.

'Shit. Damn. Sure enough, once I had stepped out, I could not turn back.'

Lorbec waved his hand weakly, signaling for his men to step back.

The corners of Nikolay's mouth curved upwards. He saw Lorbec close his eyes agonizingly. After a while, Lorbec whispered in a trembling voice.

"Shit. Fine. You can take the corpses but no more than twenty. On top of that, they must be unclaimed!"

The smile on Nikolay's face finally looked genuine. "This one will obey, my Lord." He once again passionately addressed Lorbec by his title.

'Unclaimed corpses?' Nikolay laughed in disdain. 'Since the Blood Bottle Gang wants these corpses, naturally they would be 'unclaimed' corpses.'

'Right?'

He was really happy with the police and community's cooperation.

Nikolay bowed unconventionally and turned away.

Lorbec looked at the man's back and shook his head. He then asked weakly, "Why do you all want those bodies?"

"It is for that important person to entertain a few old friends," Nikolay spoke in a frightened tone without turning his head. "Be prepared for the banquet."

When Nikolay disappeared, a few people that were observing also disappeared.

Lorbec looked at the pool of blood at his feet and saw his reflection. It was an image of a helpless middle-aged man with grizzled hair and wrinkles.

Lorbec felt disgusted in his heart. He took a deep breath and looked at the piece in his hand. He saw the one-armed swordsman smiling at him. The police chief sadly lets go and turned away. The swordsman without a saber then fell into the bloody puddle, replacing Lorbec's reflection.

...

At six in the afternoon, at Mindis Hall.

"Four five-men group with a clear-cut division of work, tacit cooperation, a supra class leading ordinary class elites —they were experienced and had extraordinary skill but

judging from their equipment and identity, they were hired men."

Gilbert stood up from the side of a dead body. He waved his hand and had a guard carry the body down.

"Mercenaries and adventurers that dared to attack the Royal Family — if the employers don't have ample rewards promised to them, it would mean that they were confident that they could avoid the danger."

The middle-aged noble stood on the first floor of the hall, his hands clasped at his back. He suppressed his disgust towards the collaborators. He faced an empty corner and asked, "As a previous adventurer what do you think?"

A hoarse voice came from the void, "Both, but it is mostly the latter — the employer did not tell them the truth, such as 'You would not encounter a supra-class person or you would not encounter more than twenty guards.'"

"Maybe the employer never imagined that our guards would be extraordinary. On top of that, you were also there," the middle-aged noble replied.

The corpses were then carried down from the stairs, the roof, and the corridor. Gilbert watched the guards carry away the invaders and clean up the bloodstains. He then lowered his head and was lost in thought.

"But this is still too simple," he muttered.

"Although we had doubled the guards at Mindis Hall, even though they were all well-trained ordinary class and supra class Swordsmen of Termination, and even though they were simply hired-hands to test things out, we had still managed this too easily and casually."

The guards that carried the corpses ignored Gilbert who was talking to himself. It looked as though Gilbert was talking to an empty space until Yodel appeared out of thin air beside him.

"They were not aware of death nor were they planning to kill the guards," the secret masked bodyguard whispered.

"If I had acted a little later, they would have probably retreated."

Gilbert frowned deeply. "This is not right. Even if they are here just to test things out, they were too hasty in their approach. It is almost as though they..."

Yodel continued, "It was as though they wanted to die."

The gray hair middle-aged noble nodded. "If their employers are really the people we suspect, then they must know that if we have an important secret this kind of deployment would be useless. So what are the reasons for their actions? Were they covering for someone else?"

Yodel shook his head and replied, "No. I did not detect any other person."

"If there was nobody else..."

At this moment, Gilbert and Yodel both looked up and out of the door. In the sunset, a simple carriage was driven on the road towards Mindis Hall.

Gilbert listened to the report of the guard and nodded. "Jines has arrived."

"That woman." Gilbert frowned. "She usually hates to sit in narrow places like carriages but it looks like she endured her likes and dislikes to create a deception."

After listening to those words, Yodel suddenly looked up!

Gilbert felt strange. Initially, he wondered why the secret guard whose expression was not visible had so much of a reaction. However, immediately his face also turned pale and looked back at Yodel in shock.

'Deception. Could it be?'

"Didn't you say that you did not detect any other person?" Gilbert asked, looking pale.

Yodel turned to look upstairs. His body flashed.

"I left eight of the Swordsmen of Termination upstairs..." However, before Gilbert could finish, Yodel had already disappeared.

'Wait. He did not detect any other 'person... '

Gilbert ferociously beat his head.

"Everyone! Gather at the third floor fast! Protect your objective!"

...

Thales had cold sweat as he looked at the man in front of him. He was a pale-faced adult man wearing a gorgeous pleated sleeved jacket and branded leather boots. The man had suddenly appeared between him and the eight Swordsman of Termination.

No wind, no sound, no qi, no trace.

After that, out of the corner of his eyes, Thales saw the eight Swordsmen of Termination spurting blood from their necks.

When Thales turned his head, they had all already fallen to the ground. They simply twitched and groaned meaninglessly.

Thales had met powerful enemies before such as the Mystic Asda. However, Thales had never encountered enemies that appeared so suddenly.

Even with Thales' outstanding observation, he could not react in time. He completely did not see how the man moved.

Thales subconsciously wanted to shout but suddenly a right hand appeared in front! This well-dressed man suddenly covered his mouth.

Thales still could not see the man's movements.

Even when a master like Ralf, the Phantom Wind Follower, moved swiftly, his shadows and the trajectories of his movement could still be seen.

However, this was totally absent with the movement the man made with his right hand. It was like animated frames.

Thales who struggled fruitlessly gave up wasting his energy. He calmed down, did his utmost to normalize his heartbeat, and looked at the man in front of him.

The man who was slightly taller than Yodel had tidy blonde hair and behind it, his blue pupils were clear. Although his face was morbidly pale, he was — Thales could only say it this way — very handsome.

Compared to Asda's gentle charm this man had a more 'bright and easygoing' type of face. Along with his simple but elegant taste of clothes, he would definitely attract girls when he goes out. Unfortunately, Thales could not feel any warmth from his body.

A sweet-smelling perfume wafted from his body. Even a country bumpkin like Thales could recognize that this was not the cheap perfume used by the citizens at the bazaar.

Right now, the handsome man gave him a pale smile.

"It was just a simple workout for me but look at what I found.

"A mortal creature."

'A mortal creature?'

Thales took note of this special term.

"The smell on your body... *slurp* really delicious. Sure enough, food can be found at unexpected places!"

However, at the next moment, the easy-going blonde man's expression suddenly changed.

He held Thales' hand and glimmered again. The next moment, Thales was held in the man's arms with his mouth covered.

"He realized so quickly. That masked guy. I cannot deal with him." The handsome blonde man muttered, "I might as well take this home to eat. Fortunately, the sun is setting."

That was the last thing Thales heard. The next moment, his eyes were surrounded by a boiling hot and blood-red package. He felt the sky spin.

The scene at Mindis Hall seemed to spin and getting smaller.

Before his consciousness vanished, he vaguely saw Yodel's mask appearing amidst the eight fallen Swordsmen of Termination.

Chapter 24

Immortal Species (One)

Lorbec cautiously sat on a club visitor's chair. He looked reserved instead of having the conduct and dignity of a Class One Police Chief.

At the corner of his eyes, he could see the Tricolor Iris Flowers symbol on the study and the portrait of an amiable old man.

Lorbec knew that even if he had the city under control and was the suzerain who had the real power over the city, he could not comfortably sit there and talk to the extremely graceful but threatening young noble opposite him.

On top of that, the man was only a small police chief.

"Thank you for meeting me despite your busy schedule," Lorbec said as he bowed respectfully.

"Please do not say that! According to your experience and status, you are more than qualified to be my teacher. These were my late father's words." The young man had curly iron-colored hair, round face and thick lips. The man had a friendly smile. He jokingly said, "Although my father and I are different when it comes to the taste of wine, both of us agree when it concerns getting your respect."

Lorbec promptly nodded, feeling warm in his heart. "The late Duke is a virtuous person and also magnanimous and benevolent. On this point, you are not inferior in any respect."

After these words, the young man looked at the portrait in the study. The late Duke's smile was kind and amiable.

After a few seconds, the young man recovered from his thoughts.

"I am sorry. It has been two years but I still... I hope I have not disgraced him." The young man shook his head with a wry smile. He then stood up, looked faintly at the distance with a fleeting sad smile and sighed leisurely. "I sometimes think. If my father

was still here... I would rather listen to him scold me."

Lorbec felt somewhat awkward. On one hand, he also missed the late kindhearted Duke. On the other, he felt that the young Duke showing his true feelings this way was a very private thing and that he himself must not interrupt indiscriminately.

Fortunately, the young Duke promptly turned around. He shelved his memories and joked to relieve the awkwardness.

"Well, as long as he does not raise the subject of wine."

Listening to this remark, Lorbec and the young man laughed silently.

It was common knowledge that the late Duke loved to drink Eckstedt rye wine while the young Duke preferred the exquisite wine from Sera Duchy fine grape brew. Because of this, both of them argued on more than one occasion in front of the Tricolor Iris Flowers family emblem. It got to the point where they almost pulled out their swords to duel. Only the late Duchess and the lovely Miss Hille could, with a murderous glare or a coquettish look, get them both to stop at the table.

With just a few words from the young man, the awkwardness and embarrassment in the house vanished.

While laughing, the young man put down an agarwood wooden pipe in his hand. He then walked to the bar and picked up a bottle of unlabeled wine.

"I am sorry. I do not actually smoke. However, just now I went to the horse market I talked to the elderly there for a bit," the young man explained with a wry smile. "So, I hoped that holding a pipe would make me look a bit older. They would rather pay attention to a horse that lost a hoof as opposed to a young man selling his ideas to suppress bandits."

The sharp-eyed Lorbec noticed that among the various bottles of grape wine on the bar was a conspicuously placed bottle of strong black rye wine. Although it was never opened it was kept spotlessly clean.

Lorbec could not help but feel touched by the thought of the late Duke.

It had been two years since the death of the late Duke Covendier. This was the first time Lorbec had met the new Duke privately. However, in a matter of minutes, the

police chief was already impressed by the amiable and approachable young Duke.

He was worthy of being passed down as one of the Six Big Clans. He deserved the 'Rather die for friends than foes' Tricolor Iris. He was truly the son of the late Duke. It seems the Covendiers have a successor.

The police chief bowed a little and then confirmed the young man's opinion. "Only those that lack talent would rely on seniority to speak. I believe that Your Excellency's character and abilities would be enough for this."

"I cannot thank you enough." The young Duke forced a smile and brought two glasses of wine. He offered Lorbec a glass. "These words coming from the mouth of the youngest chief of the Police Department. They really make me feel at ease. Did you know how Duke Cullen encouraged me?"

Lorbec happily took the red wine. His restraint had vanished at some point in time. He found it ridiculous as he watched the young Duke imitate the posture and the manner of speaking of the pot-bellied East Coast Duke.

"Do not worry. Little Zayen! You know, both your father and I were raised by the former king with a liberal smacking of the buttocks." The young Duke's expression twisted as he imitated Duke Cullen. His face was red as he said in a thick voice, "So if anyone questions our qualifications, we are going to show them our backsides!"

Lorbec and the young Duke burst into laughter again and they knocked their glasses together and emptied their wine.

A person with a high position but humble stance would always maximize goodwill from his subordinate.

After the cordial and friendly exchange, they finally talked about the main topic.

The young Duke finally frowned.

"I need a lot of bodies? Old friends? Banquet?" The young Duke Covendier voiced his doubts. "That person really said that?"

Lorbec nodded solemnly. "He said that he was following your order but as far as I know..."

"Even if I was crazy, I would not give such an order!" Duke Covendier solemnly put the glass down and resolutely waved his hand.

Lorbec finally calmed down after seeing the young Duke's actions.

"I am new to government affairs. I also have not paid attention to the Blood Bottle Gang contact details. However, you have ample experience and are a police officer that knows about worldly affairs. What do you think of this?" the young Duke raised his head and earnestly asked.

The young Duke's humble and respectful attitude made Lorbec feel comfortable. So, he wholeheartedly provided his opinion.

"As far as I know, there are not many situations that require the use of corpses. The mysterious Mystics have died off long ago. The heretical god or demon sacrifices have not appeared for a long time. It is also not possible for the Blood Bottle Gang to expand to medical and therapeutic areas. So, what is left are races that live on dead bodies or blood." Lorbec analyzed in detail.

Zayen Covendier nodded slowly and closed his eyes as though he was thinking about something. After about a dozen seconds, he suddenly opened his eyes to stare at Lorbec. He incredulously said, "Immortal species?"

Lorbec nodded in affirmation.

The duke gave a long sigh.

The police chief no longer spoke. He knew that the next step was to wait for the promising young and high ranked noble to give the final decision.

"Through bribery or persuasion, progressively and in an orderly manner, bring the underworld into the kingdom's structure and legal system..." The young Duke's complexion looked bad. He put his hands behind his back and slowly strolled around the room. This reminded Lorbec of the late Duke.

"This is the governing policy my great grandfather was ordered to use during the reign of Kessel IV. The Blood Bottle Gang was a fruitful example for decades."

"However, it looks like they have now fallen into conflict. They cannot avoid revealing their lawless nature." The young Duke furrowed and cautiously chose his words.

"Although there is a rising gang that is pressing down on their territory, blindly permitting it is not a long-term solution."

"The use of Red Street Market to lay an ambush has endangered the lives and properties of the Kingdom's residents. It even alarmed the Imperial Council and caused His Majesty to question furiously. It was extremely excessive and even overly atrocious..."

The young Duke's face was solemn and majestic. His words were firm and cold. Each word sank into Lorbec's heart, making him respect the other even more.

"On top of that, after losing the internal strife, he did not restrain his bad temper and licked his own wounds. Unexpectedly, he was like a cornered beast and wanted to use an outsider to help him prevail. He even used my name to threaten the police and demand for the corpses."

"Simply preposterous!"

Lorbec lowered his head and waited for the final verdict of the Tricolor Iris Flower.

"Ashford!"

The young duke shouted loudly and a white-haired butler in formal wear answered as he came in. Lorbec recognized the man and hurriedly greeted him. The man was the late Duke's most trusted butler.

The old butler meticulously greeted in return. He then respectfully listened to the commands of the Young Master.

"Who is the person maintaining contact with the Blood Bottle Gang? Forget it. No matter who it is, tell him to come to my study to explain himself!"

"Send in a group of people bearing our Tricolor Iris flag. Go and get some answers from any Blood Bottle Gang member who has authority. They must give me an explanation for threatening my father's trusted lieutenant and a police officer of the kingdom!"

"In addition, send another small squad, with a supra-class Knight of Eradication. Go and find their new guests and flush out those that desecrate corpses like vampires and werewolves! If you find any that violate the Pact of Humans and Immortal Species, you

do not need to ask any more questions and immediately bring their heads to me — never mind, that would be too messy — just give their heads to the dogs!"

"Prepare the carriage and my clothes. I will move my trip to Renaissance palace next week ahead of time. Sigh. These matters about gangs and the common people. I hope His Majesty would listen to me..."

"Notify the Kingdom's Secret Intelligence Department, His Excellency Morat, that they should pay more attention to the Grand Banquet Hall and Wild Vast Mountain. Immortal species enjoying corpses in the kingdom? Hmph! When did they last gather at the kingdom? The Bloody Year? If I had found out that the vampires and werewolves interfered in our internal affairs again to subvert Constellation..."

When Lorbec heard this, he knew he must not listen anymore. He quickly bowed. With the friendly and encouraging gaze from the Duke, Lorbec left the study.

Behind him, the young Duke was still unhappily exhorting the butler.

The police chief stepped out of the main door of the Covendier's family estate and exhaled with relief. That evening, after the discussions with the Duke, he knew he would not suffer any serious consequences due to disagreements with the Blood Bottle Gang.

Most importantly, he had seen Zayen Covendier in person and sincerely felt that...

'There is still hope in this deteriorating kingdom.'

...

After confirming that Lorbec had left the estate, the butler Ashford quietly closed the door to the study.

Duke Zayen closed his eyes. He took a deep breath and sat down on his chair.

"I really admire him. He is already forty and yet he still has so much ardor." Zayen rubbed the bridge of his nose gracefully in relief. His face looked tired. "It was as though he could change anything. It is a pity that taking care of the self-esteem of an official, especially one that has a high position, is compulsory."

"His Late Excellency thought highly of his talent. Besides that, he is likely worried

about how the Blood Bottle Gang's discord would affect your perception, Your Excellency." Ashford quietly poured a glass of wine for his master. He then walked back to the wine counter and began to clean the many bottles, especially that bottle of rye wine.

"Speaking of the Blood Bottle Gang..." Zayen lifted the glass, gently sipped, and enjoyed the sweet wine.

He then shook his head and showed a helpless expression. "They openly went to the police to request for corpses. I really do not know whether to laugh or cry. Mystics originate from magicians. I believe they would have the appropriate wisdom."

"Their leader, the Air Mystic, had disappeared after last night's battle," Ashford quietly reminded his master. "On top of that, after the crushing defeat of the Blood Bottle Gang, their manpower became stretched thin. They presumably could no longer supply the Corleone family's blood food. This resulted in this stupid action." Ashford did not bother to glance at Zayen. Instead, he concentrated on wiping the bottle of rye wine that the Old Duke was never willing to drink.

"Losing a battle that is necessary to win must cost a lot." Zayen pondered as he shook his glass of wine lightly.

"However, I must make up for my own mistakes."

"The Eckstedt's diplomatic group would arrive in the nation next month. The scheduled transfer of manpower from the Blood Bottle Gang may not be sufficient." Zayen looked down at his wine. He looked worried as he smelled its fragrance.

He closed his eyes and exhaled deeply. He then slowly unbuttoned his collar and sipped his wine again.

As the wine flowed into his throat, Zayen looked up at his father's portrait. The man's kind smile made him feel even more burdened.

"At least the Corleone family had quickly responded to your invitation. Letters have also been secretly sent out to the others. Based on their relationship with the Tricolor Iris Flower, I believe there would be a reply soon," Ashford lightly replied.

"Hmph. The Corleone family is simply the leader of the 'Lower Seven Pillars' of the Night Kingdom but barely three people and some blood slaves came." Zayen frowned

and poured out the wine at the bottom of the glass. He closed his eyes and gently rubbed his temple. "This is not their usual style."

Ashford lowered his head, signaling that he was listening.

"A Duke who has lots of descendants rich in blood, like the powerful Blood Clan, ended up in the same situation as the beggars of the Lower City District. The blood of the dead should have been enough but they still impatiently wanted more and reached out to the living. On top of that, they even asked for ordinary class and supra class fighters." Zayen slowly opened his eyes.

His eyes seemingly turned darker. He received more wine from Ashford as he faintly said, "What a pity."

"After all, you are the one that 'invited' them here and provided them with 'food and lodging'," Ashford silently said to remind his master.

"They hid the truth — about the current situation of the Corleone family," Zayen said expressionlessly. He closed his eyes and exhaled to calm his mind. When he opened his eyes, his gaze was ice cold. "Any accidents may destroy our plan."

He then heavily said, "Let Seychelles and Cassain bring a group of four knights to the Vine Manor."

"First, discuss this with Nikolay. Pressure the Blood Bottle Gang. As long as they do not make trouble, the Iris would ensure their survival."

"Since they were already defeated, why do they want to make a fuss? After that, there is also the three vampires that came from the Eastern Peninsula."

Zayen Covendier's tone was resolute and without doubt. His round face was calm yet terrifying for some reason.

"Find out the secret that they are hiding. If they do not cooperate..."

"Draft a formal letter to the Sunset Temple. The Covendier family has always been loyal to the Sunset Monarch. With this letter, attach three vampire skulls to say hello."

"Summon an interrogation for the East Continent's intelligence. I want to know all the recent events of the Night Kingdom."

"The three Blood Clan cannot be used anymore. Let us find someone else for this matter."

Duke Zayen lightly put down the glass in his hand.

'King Kessel would be forty-eight the following year. All the kings chose their successors at this age. (When Luo Er Xing transmigrates four times at the starry sky.) This is the crucial moment for the succession of the throne. But the contest with the other five powerful clans is the real crucial point.

'If Jadestar was destined to be without an offspring, then the equally remarkable descendent of Leinster Covendier, who had fought together from the start with King Tormond I, with his Tricolor Iris Flag, would take the oath of King.

'That way, I would have enough authority to... '

Thinking of this, Zayen felt his shoulders turn heavier but stronger.

He remembered about the fat Duke Cullen. Zayen's pupils moved slightly as he laughed. There were no traces of warmth in his eyes.

Ashford put the bottle in his hands down, made a perfect bow and left.

"That's right. Although it is just a trifling matter, have Seychelles ask Nikolay."

Zayen looked up. Duke Covendier of the 'Tricolor Iris' eyes were abstruse as he asked, "How is the probing of the Mindis Hall?"

Chapter 25

Immortal Species (Two)

Red. The color of blood.

He shook his head feeling dizzy.

'Where am I?'

Sharp pain assaulted his chest and abdomen.

He groaned in bewilderment. He opened his eyes in a daze only to see bloodiness in front of him.

At this moment, a familiar and gentle voice said, "Qiren. Do not move! Hold on a little more! The ambulance is coming."

He was calm for a moment but at the next moment, the pain in his chest and the dizziness in his head became more intense.

"Wu Qiren!" The voice became more and more alarmed. "You cannot die here! You... Right. You still have not changed the world! How could you die here? You still have not changed the world. What qualification do you have to have a baby with me then?"

'Change the world? Have a baby?'

His sobered up a little and breathed heavily. He felt much better.

In a bloodied state he endured the acute pain and put on a forced smile.

"Is the Second Year Syndrome treatable... ahh1"

The familiar voice was seemingly crying tears of joy. However, the weeping laughter seemed to get softer and weaker like a candle about to die out.

He suddenly panicked.

'No. It will not happen.'

He smiled painfully and wanted to call out to that voice. He wanted to joke around with her as usual. However, when he opened his mouth, he found that he could not call out her name.

It was still red and bloody in front of him but his whole body felt hotter.

Poof

Thales fell into a thicket of grass. He opened his eyes and became fully aware.

"Damn it! What happened?" By Thales' side was the pale-skinned blond-haired man cursing angrily.

"How did it use up so much blood?" His voice was filled with suspicion and dissatisfaction.

Thales realized that the blond-haired man turned into watery blood and took him flying at high speeds. Thales had another flashback. In that fragment of dreamland, it seemed he 'lost control' again,

'This time the displacement is effected by the blond-haired man through watery blood?'

Thales felt as though he had just got off a roller coaster, crashing on the ground and coughing dryly.

'Fortunately, I have experienced carsickness... Er, 'man-sickness with Yodel before this.'

Thales thought to himself as he shook his head, trying to get rid of the disturbing red blood color from his mind.

"It is obviously almost time to go. Could it be that the injury has not yet healed? The Blood Image Dance is no longer proficient..." The handsome blonde murmured and rudely grabbed Thales.

'It looks as though it is already dusk. Has the sun set behind the hill? It is also a bit cold. Are we outdoors?'

Thales could clearly see that they had fallen on a dusky trail by a thicket of grass. In front of him was an expansive manor with a large garden.

A flag flapped at the iron gate located between the garden and the dusky trail. Weeds grew thick at the manor as though its owner never took care of it.

If not for the fact that it was less refined, it could have been comparable to Mindis Hall.

'That flag.' Thales narrowed his eyes and saw three strange petals. It was red, blue and green in color.

Thales recognized the flower. It was the favorite flower of Wu Qiren's first girlfriend.

'Is this an Iris? Is this a noble's coat of arms? This is probably one of the 'enemies' that Gilbert mentioned. What terrible luck. I fell right into an enemy's nest.'

"Go quickly! Little whelp of the mortal species!" The blonde impatiently pushed him towards the manor.

Thales' thoughts furiously churned and reasoned.

'Looks like this handsome young man knows how to speak and is not just a brute that is difficult to tame. On top of that, he had also left behind other words such as how this was just an exercise and how it was fortunate that the sun was about to set.'

Thales thought it was fortunate that the guy seemed rational and then tried to find a countermeasure. The JC dagger was at his waist but it was evident he could not hope to 'put this dagger to the man's neck' or anything like that. He also could not suddenly injure himself to inform Gilbert and Yodel as it was too meticulous and obvious.

He could only gather intelligence first.

"Hey!" Thales turned around and shook off the blonde's hand. "I see you have the demeanor and temperament of a noble. Your actions must match your appearance. Pay attention to your manners!"

The blond-haired man was stopped by this remark.

"Manners? Demeanor?" The man grinned and deliberately revealed his two ferocious fangs. "I need to show manners to food fated to be eaten?"

The man purposely ground his sharp fangs.

'It is really similar to that creature from my memories.'

Thales leaned ahead and glanced at the two fangs. He contemptuously curled his lips and said, "Your attitude towards food is terrible. You do not have the talent of a gourmet. The mental and physical conditions of the food could affect its quality. What are you going to do if your rudeness affects its taste?"

The handsome blonde was stunned for about three seconds and his malevolent expression had half relaxed. He then replied, "Nonsense. Little whelp, you certainly have guts." The man then laughed and added, "However, you are not the first food that was courageous. No need to try your luck. You cannot escape."

"So that my flesh and blood would become tastier?" Thales showed an expression as if he finally understood. He then unexpectedly walked towards the manor.

The man had gotten ready to carry him to the manor ahead when the man saw him walk to the front by himself.

The blond-haired man stretched his hand to scratch his head, puzzled at the food (he felt disdain in calling them 'prey') that did not seem to have any intention to escape. Half-way through the man felt that this was inappropriate and could only put down his hand. He then quickly kept up with Thales with a speed visible to humans.

"Not your flesh and blood. Just your blood. I believe you should have been injured recently? The smell of blood is drifting everywhere. Tsk. It is so fragrant I feel like having a mouthful first."

The two continued to move forward.

"Then how do you prepare to eat me? Do you nibble or just suck the blood? From where do you start? Do you use seasonings?"

"The Tuvalus like to eat their meat raw. They enjoy the howling of their prey. We generally suck the blood directly and it is divided into neck food and wrist food. As for seasonings... Wait. Why am I talking about these to a short-lived whelp like you?"

The blonde stopped and looked at Thales who evidently did not behave like a seven-year-old.

"I am destined to be food right? Shouldn't it be a virtue to be polite to food that willingly gets sacrificed? Isn't that a virtue? Food that was in a good mental state may even taste better."

"You... are weird as food. Do you think your actions would make me release you?"

"It is hard to come by good food. Of course, it must be rare. Come. There is no need to stop. Let us continue walking. What is your name sir?"

"Young whelp? Why do you ask? Do you want revenge?" The blonde stopped again. His suspicion and vigilance of the boy increasing.

"With your skill, it would not be easy to take revenge on you. Since I am already about to be eaten by you, you should at least tell me your name, right? Besides that, isn't shouting hey inconsiderately too boorish? Mm... You are not an illegitimate child without a surname right? You should at least have a name."

The blonde seemingly felt his pride stabbed by the last few words. He then proudly replied, "My name is Istrone van Leica Liszt Corleone from the Night Kingdom. The Leader of Seven Pillars, the Corleone Family's first-class Blood Knight."

"Come. Come. Let us keep moving. So why do you call me a mortal?"

"What else could humans who have lifespans of less than one hundred and twenty years old be other than mortals? Even young whelps like you would live another ninety years at most." Istrone showed disdain.

"So you guys are 'immortals' that have longer lifespans compared to us?"

"Of course. A vampire's lifespan is endless, more than what the inferior mortals could imagine."

Thales quietly filed away the information in his mind.

'Istrone Corleone. Mortals. Immortals. Night Kingdom. Corleone Family. The superior vampires. The most important point was that he did not seem interested as to why I appeared at Mindis Hall. This may be my only way out... Oh. I had forgotten that he wanted to 'eat' me'.

Thales and Istrone walked into the manor. The transmigrator's eyes narrowed. At the

entrance, two fierce-looking men wearing red scarves headed towards them.

'The Blood Bottle Gang? Why are they here?'

"Tell me. Why did you we stop here? Is it better to simply fly in?"

"If it was not because of the Blood Image Dance... Sigh..."

The handsome Istrone suddenly realized that the mortal whelp could understand his words. So, he gracefully cleared his throat and indifferently continued.

"Hmph. I would have flown in if this was my territory. However, we are only guests and need to maintain respect and courtesy towards the host."

'An immortal that pays attention to elegance.' Thales thought to himself.

The two helpers from the Blood Bottle Gang walked up. They looked at the two with bad expressions and said, "Who is it?"

However, Istrone furrowed his eyebrows. With a cool expression, he interrupted them with disdain.

"Get lost! Inferior mortals!"

Thales' expression twitched as he took back his earlier words.

...

A few minutes ago,

After the fiasco from the 'One Night War', one of the few Blood Bottle Gang members who were in power rushed back to the capital. One full day after the battle the head of the Psionic Warriors, 'Red Viper' Nikolay, still looked hard pressed.

In the very least, together with the other three Psionic Warriors, he had to preserve the current status before the Blood Mystic, who had stayed hidden for a very long time, rushed back.

First, he had to deal with the aftermath of the One Night War. Other than the explosion, there was also the issue of the Air Mystic disappearing without any trace. His personal

bodyguard, that lunatic with the sword, was lying there with Ralf. Their upper bodies were almost cut open. One could only guess that Asda had also been killed. So, Nikolay had to make certain that the Brotherhood's three Assassins, especially the Black Sword himself, was in the capital before he could leave in peace. (In fact, Tinker, who had just come back from the Red Street Market, thought that he was oversensitive. Even if the Black Sword was at the capital, the man would not bother looking at him.)

Tinker and Noumea were amongst the few Twelve Strongest of the Blood Bottle Gang to return. ("Shit. So it was the cowards who would live to the end."- Nikolay) They would not say what happened at the Red Street Market except that there was fear and panic. Nikolay had given up looking for the truth. As for revenge for the Air Mystic, he would discuss this with the Blood Mystic once that person returns.

The Blood Bottle Gang's morale took a huge blow after losing the highly profitable Red Street Market that they had occupied for a long time. Most of the common helpers had begun to waver. Their customers, regardless of whether they were nobles, merchants or people from the same trade, expressed deep unswerving friendship to the Blood Bottle Gang, but at the same time reduced all their dealings and withdraw their funds. Some even broke their contracts. (Shit! Calm down. Stay calm. The debt of blood must be repaid! – Nikolay)

The Blood Bottle Gang members whose morale had fallen at the other districts in the capital retreated when confronted with the irresistible 'inferior' Brotherhood. It could be imagined that when the news spread nationwide, the fight at every branch would likely end up the same way.

Second, the major supporter behind the Blood Bottle Gang, the Covendier Family with the crest of the Tricolor Iris was indifferent even after finding out about their crushing defeat. He did not appease them nor did he reinforce them. He also did not even spend a single copper to comfort them.

What Nikolay resented the most was that they had previously done a lot of dirty work for them all over the kingdom. At this crucial moment, Seychelles, the Knight of Termination did not even let him in through the front gate of the Duke's manor. That afternoon, he was even ordered to 'thoroughly investigate the theft at Mindis Hall'.

'Theft? Shit. Which part of me looks like a police investigator? Can I cut that part off?'

Thinking of police officers, Nikolay became even more furious. 'Damn. That cop of the

West District. That Lorbec or Lockerbie is usually smiling. I am not sure if he has dispatched people at the crucial moments of the One Night War to reinforce, did we not agree to have police-community cooperation? Forget it.' Nikolay suppressed his unhappiness.

'Lorbec had used all sorts of excuses when he wanted a few corpses. The funny part was that he acted like a righteous envoy. After receiving so many inducements you act like a righteous envoy? What are you doing talking about righteousness in front of me, Nikolay? Which part of me looks like a good person? Can I cut that part off? Damn. In the old times, I would have gone to his house, strip his wife naked and hang her at the doorbell of the Western City Gate.'

Besides that, Nikolay wanted to settle a matter involving Covendier's three vampires. The vampires were unexpectedly sent to the Blood Bottle Gang's branch in the Eastern City District. (The Vine Manor was actually also Covendier's property.) 'Take good care of them? Did you think we are entertaining lost puppies? They want the blood of ten people every day! They even asked for supra class masters! Good. Now we might as well find the Black Sword, knock him out and then tie him up before giving him to them! I already sent them all the Blood Bottle Gang members that I disliked and it is still insufficient! I even had to softly persuade that cop for corpses! Which part of me looks like an animal breeder? Can I cut that part off? The most annoying part was that the number of vampires were not many, but were short-tempered and bossy. They looked at me as though I am a dog!'

Thus, with a bad mood, Nikolay took his entourage to the Vine Manor in the night. He lightly waved his hand as a greeting to the other Blood Bottle Gang members whose expressions were equally bad.

When he walked into the main building of the manor, to the stone staircase, he heard faint sobbings and wretched cries from below. This made Nikolay who was already in a terrible mood even more distraught.

He resisted the urge to think about the 'blood food' in the dungeon (many of whom were his former colleagues and subordinates). His face was ashen as he went up to the second floor. He pushed open the wooden door of the main hall and looked displeased at the few people in front of him. To be precise, there were two people and their food in front of him.

One was pretty, fair-skinned, had a red ponytail, sexy and was attractive. The woman

that looked like she was about thirty years of age wore a noble's horse riding clothes. She gently pushed away a man whose eyes were in a daze.

The seductive woman licked the bloodstain on her lips. She gave a captivating smile to Nikolay and extended her finger to wipe away the blood at her chin.

The man that was pushed away seemed like a plundered civilian. He looked absent-minded and his skin was deathly pale. He fell to the ground and twitched. His breathing became weaker and weaker as he soon perished.

There were at least seven to eight of these that had died from excessive blood loss in the hall. The corpses were dried up with bloodstains everywhere.

Fresh blood dripped slowly onto the ground and the table, the sound utterly terrifying.

At the full-wall window in the hall was a similarly luxuriously dressed old man with white hair. He stood with both his hands on his back and seemed to be waiting for the moon to rise.

"Oops." A gentle voice came out from the woman's mouth. Her eyes lit up. "Have you sent us something nice to eat? Are there twenty people? Was there any supra class? Any virgins? Any young children?"

"These damn vampires! Did they go out hunting for living people again?"

"Miss Rolana! Mister Chris! I just wanted to tell you something." Nikolay suppressed the unhappiness and disgust as he said unhappily to the two vampires, "The twenty corpses sent here in the afternoon is the limit. Our blood bank reserves are not that high."

When Nikolay said the words 'blood bank', he remembered the anguished cries in the prison cell and felt nauseated.

"Oh?" The attractive Rolana laughed. Her lips curled upwards and her eyes gradually showed a dangerous gaze. "Can the blood of those dead people be eaten? What we want is the blood of the living."

"Otherwise, if and when I see you Blood Bottle Gang members come and go, I might not be able to resist..." Rolana revealed her sharp fangs and adopted a charming posture. She placed her forefinger on her sharp fang. With the light from the

Everlasting Lamp along with the bloody backdrop, Rolana had a strange malevolent beauty.

"Three distinguished guests. Please understand. The Eternal Star City is the capital. Our capabilities are limited..." Nikolay suppressed his anger and quietly replied.

"Aiya. But didn't that young and cute Iris Duke said that he could give as many people and as much blood as we wanted? If he found out how his loyal dog is entertaining the guests, he may not give you bones to eat. Haha."

'Loyal dog? Bones? Fuck!'

As he listened to the peculiar humiliation and mocking words from the arrogant vampire and then thought of the Iris Duke's attitude after the defeat at the Red Street Market, also all the irritation he went through the entire day, Nikolay felt a huge fire burn in his heart.

"Fucking bitch! There are no living people!"

Nikolay roared as he ruthlessly slammed the table with his palm, disregarding all the bloodstains on it.

"Do not think I do not know that you vampires only need the blood of the dead to keep living! You do not need the blood of the living at all! This is no longer like hundreds of years ago!"

"I worked so hard to bring all these living and dead here. There was even one supra class and you complain that it is still not fucking enough?"

"If you want to eat, eat! Otherwise, get lost! I am not easily frightened! Worst comes to worst, we will just part ways! We will just pull back our troops and fight!"

"We are from Blood Bottle Gang of Constellation, we repay blood debts! We are not like Covendier who dies for his friends!"

There was a moment of silence, except for the heavy breathing of the Red Viper in the hall. Even Nikolay's entourage retreated back a little from fear.

After that, Rolana's expression changed. She extended her fangs and her expression turned malevolent. Her originally alluring voice like a spoiled child became sharp and

wild.

"Inferior mortals! I will be polite and give your master some face! Blood of corpses? You yourself could live on water, vegetables and rotting flesh. Why do you need to drink wine and eat meat? You worked hard? That half dead supra class was just used by you to avenge private wrongs. You just want us to help you settle your internal affairs. You want to talk about repaying blood debts to the Corleone Family? I can have you experience your paying of 'blood debts' right now!"

The anger in Nikolay's eyes became more intense. He gritted his teeth and pulled open his scarlet jacket. The sinister Rolana gave a delicate cry and jumped onto the top of the chandelier. She brandished her fangs and claws like a cat.

Just at the moment both sides had their daggers drawn, the old man at the window turned around.

"Rolana. Be mindful of your manners."

"Mister Nikolay. There is no need for this. If we fall out, the one embarrassed would be Duke Zayen."

His voice was not loud but clearly resounded in the ears of everyone in the hall.

Chris Corleone, the white-haired old man suddenly appeared in front of Nikolay.

Before the boss of the Blood Bottle Gang could react, Chris stretched out his hand and patted the Red Viper's shoulder.

The old man's act restrained Red Viper's anger.

Rolana descended back to the ground and returned to her captivating appearance. She laughed but her eyes still looked fierce.

"Apologies. They are still young and cannot control their temper." Chris gave a cryptic glance. His wrinkled face was dark and silent.

'Young?' Nikolay cursed in his heart. 'You have the nerve to call a monster that is several hundred years old, young?'

However, Nikolay still suppressed the anger in his heart. The circumstances do not

favor him.

'This old monster looked sickly but the skill he showed with his hand just now... With my own capabilities, I would not be able to deal with him.'

"How about this? The past few days have been exhausting for you. From now on we will deal with the matters of food by ourselves."

Chris' eyes remained fixed like his lifeless tone.

'You will solve it yourself? Based on the characteristics of the vampires, hunting for prey outside would eventually turn into a disaster! But doesn't that concur with my wishes?'

"Let's go!" Nikolay waved indignantly. "Take all our brothers away."

"Oh? Are you not even leaving one behind? There are people who still want to apologize here..." Rolana alluringly lay down on the bloody table and returned to her coquettish self.

"There is no need!" Nikolay turned his head back and replied. "It is best to avoid making Miss Rolana unable to resist."

The thugs of the Blood Bottle Gang followed behind Nikolay and went downstairs. No one felt regret leaving the nauseating manor.

After a while, only the sound of Rolana's weird laughter and the dripping of blood remained in the hall.

Nikolay soon went far away.

Rolana suddenly got down from the table. Her face was cold and stern.

"Did he notice something?"

Chris shook his death-like head. He looked like a white chess piece from afar. "This guy did not but Covendier had certainly noticed something strange. After all, so much blood is enough to feed a squad of Blood Knights."

Rolana lowered her head. "However, this is still not enough. I just wasted another one

just to put on an act. I will go hunting again."

"Fortunately, we have chased away the Blood Bottle Gang as planned. This will give us some time before we get exposed."

Chris suddenly turned his head back about a hundred degrees and looked out the window. His nose twitched a little.

"Istrone has returned. He also brought back... this fragrance... It is high-class blood."

His figure reappeared at the window. The moon came out.

...

Nikolay took the Blood Bottle Gang group and angrily stepped out of the manor.

'These damn vampires... hm? That white-faced vampire has returned. Didn't he follow those mercenaries to Mindis Hall to find treasure in the afternoon? So, he also knows how to use his legs to walk, using the main gate?'

Nikolay had thought that when the vampire was in a hurry, like what he had once seen, he would transform into watery blood and flow around.

'That white-faced vampire even brought back a boy? Damn. He also went out hunting for food? Looking at the way he is dressed, he must be from a noble family. However, he is covered in injuries... That is not right. That child does not look like he is being held hostage. Their footsteps look as though they are walking as a group.'

'That's right. I need to ask about the theft at Mindis Hall.'

While Nikolay was thinking, Istrone and Thales entered the manor.

From afar, Thales already saw the Blood Bottle Gang that was walking out.

When he thought of the flag with the Iris flower, he gloomily cried out in his heart. He knew that he had to remain calm so that he could find a way to survive the dangers ahead.

Istrone gazed fixedly ahead as though he did not pay attention to those from the Blood Bottle Gang.

Nikolay waved his hand and the Blood Bottle Gang stopped and waited for Istrone to come over.

However, the handsome blond-haired vampire simply snorted through his nose. His head looked towards the side as he impolitely walked past the Red Viper. It was as though he had no words to say.

However, the vampire immediately noticed that the human that was not even as tall as his waist strode forward with his head held high. The kid huffed and synchronized his pace as he walked past Nikolay with his nose held high.

'What kind of situation is this? Is he using his master to bully others?'

Istrone resolved himself to punish the child that loved to play dumb.

Only Thales knew that he himself was pretending to be calm by strongly suppressing the beating of his heart.

Nikolay's anger rose again.

"Hey! Pretty boy!" The Red Viper blocked Istrone's path. "Have you completed the task His Excellency the Duke has asked you to do?" Nikolay asked in a bad mood as he looked at the handsome vampire.

'His Excellency the Duke?' Thales secretly questioned.

Istrone looked up at the human who stopped him with disgust.

"The stolen treasure at Mindis Hall! Did you remember? You even took four groups of mercenaries with you!" Istrone's gaze towards him made Nikolay full of anger. Nikolay walked up to the vampire's nose and loudly shouted, "Pretty boy. Shouldn't you have obtained something?"

'Pretty boy?'

'Repulsive mortals!' Anger welled up in Istrone's heart. He originally wanted to deceive the mercenaries by sending them out and then hunt them one by one, treating them as an excellent source of blood to bring back to the manor.

He never expected the weird masked man to finish them off at Mindis Hall.

'As for the theft at the Mindis Hall, this was something requested by the Duke of the Iris Flower.'

'I still need to say something.'

Istrone turned to look at Thales. Nobody knew his state of mind that had already turned ice cold.

'What do I do? What do I do? What do I do?'

'Calm down!' The boy told himself. 'I must save myself!'

His brain spun wildly as each report and element flashed through his mind and regrouped.

Istrone lowered his head and looked at the boy. He wondered what to say to Nikolay so as to not lose face in front of the mortals.

Nikolay looked at the arrogant Istrone. He followed Istrone's gaze and then turned to the little boy beside him.

"Hey, kid..." Istrone said without paying attention.

Everyone looked at Thales. At this moment, Thales took a deep breath.

'According to the Second Year Syndrome, I am the man that is to change the world. How can I die here?'

After that, the others saw the seven-year-old boy's expression turn cold. He shouted before Istrone could say his next words.

"Yes. Your Excellency!"

Istrone froze for a moment. 'This brat. Why is he suddenly so respectful?'

However, before he could react, the situation changed.

Thales stepped forward without hesitation. He was like a loyal guard standing in between Istrone and Nikolay.

And then, under the bright moonlight...

Everyone heard the voice of the young boy with an annoying expression looking at the man currently in charge of the Blood Bottle Gang, the head of the Psionic Warriors, Red Viper Nikolay. The childish voice had an arrogant tone as he shouted,

"Get lost! Mortals! His Excellency, the noble Istrone Corleone does not need a lowly and talkative dog meddling in his affairs!"

Translator's Note:

Middle School / Second Year Syndrome. Those with it act like mature know-it-alls or think they have special powers, being obnoxious, arrogant, etc. Some may also recognize this as Chuunibyou.

Chapter 26

Negotiation

Everybody did not manage to react and were collectively stunned.

"You—" Although Nikolay was still in shock, he realized that Thales was shouting at him.

'Stray- stray dog?'

The Red Viper's expression changed from bewilderment to shock, then from shame to anger.

"What did you say... you damn little b*st*rd!"

A member of Blood Bottle Gang poked his fellow gang member beside him, making an expression, signaling that "things were not going well".

The handsome Istrone reacted, a large variety of expressions appeared on his face—it was a combination of spasms and tremors, tinged with embarrassment and awkwardness.

'This little brat is too good in acting... Is he a character from a play in Dark Night Temple?'

Nikolay clenched his fists tightly. He could feel the followers beside him exchanging glances. Their boss had just been insulted by a child right in his face. A child! Who had just been acting based on instructions by the vampire!

'This bastard!

'How dare... how dare he... Even the Blood Mystic—known for being cruel and violent—had never insulted me to my face like this!'

A surge of anger spread through Nikolay's mind. He stared fiercely at Istrone as if wanting to cut out a piece of his face.

In Nikolay's point of view, he had performed his duty and enquired about the mission's progress on behalf of the Duke. However, what did that pretty boy do?

That damned vampire turned and made a sound, signaling to his little follower. Then, that little bastard in front of the vampire took a step forward, as if he had read his mind.

With that infuriating expression on his face, he called Nikolay a lowly stray dog and told him to get lost.

But upon hearing what the little bastard said, the vampire's expression morphed into a hideous grin—It was clear that he was snickering at him in delight!

That vampire was reveling in the joy of humiliating him!

'Threatened by high-ranked police, rejected by Tricolor Iris Flowers, persecuted by that damned vampire, and then this little bastard—'

Thales watched as the Blood Bottle Gang boss' expression progressively changed, and as he contemplated whether to insult him further, his vision suddenly blurred!

The Red Viper had used his thunder-like speed and skills to grab Thales by the neck with one hand and raised him up.

Thales immediately felt his breathing become obstructed. This was not the first time he was strangled!

With his face scrunched up, just like the previous time, Thales extended his hand to grab onto his strangler's right hand. But this time, he only felt as if he had grabbed onto skin that was as hard as steel.

Nikolay's stubble that made him look ancient was magnified right in front of his eyes. His hideous expression trembled along with his mouth that opened and closed repeatedly.

The Red Viper gave a death stare to the vampire in front of him.

"Pretty boy! Your little pet—"

Before he could finish, a straight, open palm suddenly appeared before his eyes, the

side with the little finger rushing downwards.

Nikolay had no choice but to let go. He immediately backed away.

Boom!

Both of them stood still.

With a dark face, Nikolay grabbed onto Istrone's swift knife-hand strike that was aimed to attack his head from the side.

"Since you know that he is my pet, don't mess with him," the blond Istrone spoke with a disgusted expression, "mortal creature!"

Thales fell onto the floor. Unable to help it, he started coughing dryly. He mentally swore that he would never let anyone strangle his throat again. That feeling was too painful.

The Blood Bottle Gang members around them became anxious. A lot of them put their hands on the weapons at their waists.

"Pretty boy," At this moment, Nikolay was already expressionless. However, Thales could feel that his gloominess was slowly rising. The Red Viper let go of the Blood Clansman's hand and slowly enunciated each word. "Why don't you try calling me that again?"

'Although this mortal creature wasn't fast, his battle instincts and experience aren't bad—he even managed to grab my right hand.

'When dealing with someone like this, even though I'm able to overpower him in terms of speed, I still need to be careful. I didn't expect that he would be an elite near supreme class.' Istrone's heart sank as he contemplated his next move.

"What's with the annoyed expression?" Istrone's gaze became grim. "Am I wrong? You—"

The next moment, the blond noble let out a sudden, angry shout.

"—mortal creature!"

Before he even finished shouting, Nikolay's fist and Istrone's palm met in the air.

To Thales, the moment the fist and palm collided, it was as though the world had stopped. But in the next moment, it was as though all sound and wind swept past in a visible ripple.

Bang!

When it felt like time was moving again, the strong wind brought about by their fight suddenly charged towards Thales and swept past his face, forcing him to close his eyes.

Boom! Bang!

Two more gusts of wind swept past, Thales rolled around with his eyes shut. He only managed to avoid the strong wind surrounding Istrone and Nikolay after moving a few meters back.

"Is this all the speed you can muster?" The blond noble smiled strangely, then moved in a flash once again!

Nikolay, who knew that he was not fast enough, clenched his teeth and threw his next punch. Like a phantom, Istrone's silhouette would appear for one second, then disappear in the next.

In contrast, Nikolay was attacking relentlessly at high speed, like a mechanical gear, and his strikes were becoming increasingly fierce.

Both parties sported maniacal expressions and exchanged punches six times in the blink of an eye.

The strong wind brought about by the meeting of fists and palms left the Blood Bottle Gang members around them with no choice but to shield themselves with their arms. There was no way for them to interrupt the fight.

Thales recalled the duel between Jala and Ralf as they fought at their maximum speed. But for that case, it was a fight between speed and agility. For the pair in front of him, it was more like a battle between explosive power and speed.

Istrone took a step back in a flash while Nikolay dragged his left leg a step backward.

They glared fiercely at each other.

'Something is wrong! Why is this mortal from a gang getting faster and faster? He even caught up with my speed in the end!' Istrone frowned.

'Hmph! This vampire is indeed extremely agile. I will make you fall with my next attack!' Nikolay sported a ferocious expression.

Both of them bore somber expressions. They could sense their opponent's toughness and endurance.

Without warning, they exchanged fists again.

"Vampire!" Nikolay shouted furiously as his red coat fell onto the floor. He spun his body around while still maintaining balance, and the blood vessels in his right arm bulged. Then, he threw his right fist on the Blood Clansman's chest. The punch was equally astonishing in terms of spirit and speed.

"Mortal creature."

Istrone spat scornfully and immediately bared his fangs in fury. A bloody mist covered his whole body while his silhouette flickered between being an illusion and having a corporeal form. Claws grew on the fingers of his right hand. He spread out his palm and grazed past the air, grabbing onto Nikolay's throat.

Thales shuddered. He immediately imitated the Blood Bottle Gang members around him and raised both of his arms to protect himself in anticipation of the next, probably most brutal gust of strong wind.

Both parties struck after accumulating strength in their attacks and interlocked in the air.

Thales shut his eyes tight. But the anticipated blast of strong wind and deafening thump did not come.

"As you people have already greeted each other," a raspy voice spoke languidly, "it's time to disperse."

Thales slowly opened his eyes. Istrone's sharp claws and Nikolay's heavy punch were held tightly by both hands of an old noble who suddenly appeared on the scene. His

face was as pale and gloomy as a corpse.

It was as if all the strength and vigor in their attacks from before had disappeared without a trace in the old man's palms.

'It can't be? Even if he managed to block the impact between those two, there had to be at least shock mitigation and inertia. How can an exchange of force at that level show no signs at all?' Thales thought in fear.

The old man turned from left to right, looking at both of them. Istrone's expression was indignant while Nikolay's was filled with wariness along with a tinge of surprise.

'Supreme class,' the Red Viper muttered to himself. 'Not only that, he is an elite within the supreme class! Only Blood Clan dukes, or even marquises, possess this strength. Even within the 'Six Great Pillars' in the Blood Clan's Grand Banquet Hall, there aren't many people like this!'

The old man flashed a hideous smile and released his hands in the blink of an eye. Without having to be reminded, the two who were fighting took a step back.

"Sir Nikolay, you do not have to lock horns with a young person. Please leave right now." His dry lips opened and closed like a puppet.

Nikolay looked at the followers around him. Their faces were full of fear and anxiety.

'God damn it, such an unlucky day.'

He began to understand that if the Blood Mystic did not return, nothing would go right for Blood Bottle Gang.

'Looks like I'll have to personally head to Steel City and invite her back no matter what price had to be paid.'

"Hmph!"

Nikolay angrily snorted. He looked at the old man, and then at Istrone, who was provoking him with his glare. Clenching his teeth, he spoke, "Okay, okay, fine. Hopefully, the duke and all the Knights of Eradication under him are as good-tempered as I am."

The red flush had not disappeared from Nikolay's face, but he did not speak any further. He waved his hand and left with the others.

"Little bastard, when they suck your blood dry—" As Nikolay was leaving the manor, he turned and glared fiercely at Thales. His tone was venomous. "Don't scream too miserably."

He took his coat from his follower. After he put it on, all Blood Bottle Gang members left the manor.

Thales sighed in his heart. He had managed to live through this; had even managed to live through the incident in Mindis Hall.

He was safe for now. However, the strange old man's next sentence made Thales' heart beat with fear once again.

"So, my little friend... I am guessing that you are probably related to their mission in Mindis Hall... am I right?"

Istrone Corleone turned his head around like a puppet, cracked a smile with his wrinkle-filled lips and said, "It seems that both Tricolor Iris Flowers and Blood Bottle Gang... are very interested in you?"

.....

"So, you were saying that, on the second day of his arrival, you, being His Majesty's most trusted attendant, the former Foreign Affairs Minister, the head and signatory of the 'Fortress Treaty'—Count Gilbert Caso; and you, His Majesty's most reliable secret protector, the 'Nameless Person', Yodel Cato, whose background is unknown to me—"

It was a mature female voice. As the sun set, it rang on Mindis Hall's roof.

"—lost His Majesty's only child and heir, just like that?"

The woman was mature and dignified. She was a charming forty-year-old woman donned in the standard green and blue uniform of first-grade female officials. In the face of this alluring black-haired woman, both Gilbert and Yodel bowed their heads slightly.

'Although we are prepared for this woman's arrival,' Gilbert thought, 'I never thought that we would be meeting her under these circumstances.' Every time he thought of the woman's special and awkward status, Gilbert felt his head ache.

Presumably, Yodel, who was beside him, felt the same.

"Yes, Lady Jines," Gilbert said quietly. His tone was full of angst and regret.

Yodel did not say anything, but he was slowly clenching his left fist.

"You people searched the area for an hour but could not find any clues?"

"Yes, Lady Jines," Gilbert spoke with shame.

The gears on Yodel's mask turned a little.

"And then, the only thing we can depend on—" Lady Jines pointed at the lamp in her hand and spoke unhurriedly with a mocking and angry tone, "—is this worn-out lamp and the little kindling Yodel is holding?"

"Yes, Lady Jines," the pitiful Gilbert continued to answer.

Jines did not speak any further. She stared at them for an extremely long time with a displeased expression.

Gilberts' heart sank further and further.

After a long while, Jines made a nasal huff.

She shut her eyes and slowly said, "His Majesty's forty-eighth birthday is approaching. I can guarantee you that the Six Great Clans' plans are in full operation. They want to coerce His Majesty into selecting a crown prince from among the nobles, whether in the form of adoption or having a child from one of the noble families take the royal surname.

"And that child was our only hope in the darkness." Jines took a deep breath and opened her eyes. She spoke slowly and clearly, "And then, you people... lost... him!"

Gilbert and Yodel lowered their heads further.

"Men are indeed unreliable."

Jines put the Bloodline Lamp on the roof and exhaled in disdain. "Alright. Let's dispatch all our people. We will begin searching from where that child disappeared! Even if that child is indeed as intelligent as you say... we cannot just sit around and wait for that lamp. This will only prove that we are incapable and cowardly!"

Under the night sky, the mature, charming woman suddenly turned her head towards them and growled furiously at them in the kind of tone used to reprimand subordinates, "Why are you people still standing here?"

As if suddenly roused from sleep, Gilbert and Yodel came out of their petrified modes and walked forward.

"You useless men. You better put... in... some... effort!"

...

Thales was pressed onto a chair by Istrone inside the manor's inner hall.

He swallowed hard and moved his buttocks slightly to the side to avoid a patch of sticky, red substance.

'Without the dried dead bodies that can be seen everywhere in the hall, the wet and dry patches of blood stains on the dining table and the floor, and these three obviously abnormal people before me—this place would actually be quite decent.'

The boy looked at the man, woman, and old man in front of him, and flashed an awkward, friendly, and toothy smile.

"Such an excellent source of blood! This fragrance, oh my, Istrone, as your cousin sister, it seems that I have looked down on you in the past. I thought that you were only out taking a walk with that group of humans!"

It was a sexy woman with a red ponytail. She was so excited that her eyes shone. She bent down and carefully scrutinized Thales.

Thales only flashed a silly smile.

His instincts told him that at the moment, apart from showing friendliness and

cooperation, other actions would be inappropriate.

He thought about cutting open his hand in secret, but he was sure that the sensitivity towards the smell of blood for these three was definitely higher than Morris' Angry Wolfhound.

Having heard his cousin sister's words, Istrone's heart missed a beat. Luckily, as a member of the Blood Clan, he did not have the capability to blush. However, he still extended his hands with hesitation and pulled Rolana—who was almost salivating over Thales— backward slightly.

In his heart, he had already raised the little brat's level of suspicion and level of danger to the same level as the merfolk in Crystal Wall City and the Priests in Sunrise Temple.

"Rolana, be careful, there's something off about this young brat. It's better not to talk to him too much. In my opinion, we should just connect the phlebotomy device and nutrient canal right away, and then put him in the coffin," the blond Blood Clan member said awkwardly.

"He is a target that Duke Iris Flower is especially looking for, stays in a heavily-guarded royal property and ordered a first grade Blood Clan knight of Corleone Family about. That knight did not even notice it," the old man with the deathly-still countenance spoke quietly. Istrone, who was beside him turned away in embarrassment. "Of course there is something wrong with this young brat! We have to at least dig out all the secrets he has from his mouth—this is my expertise."

On the dining table to Thales' left, Rolana lied on her stomach and licked her lips while watching him. "Make a small opening on his wrist and hang him upside down. As we interrogate him, we can satisfy our appetites. Not a single drop will be wasted. I heard from my mother that the Lauriloria Family always did this."

Istrone hesitated for a bit. As he grew up, Chris, the butler, had traumatized Istrone. Additionally, the old man's merciless reprimand just now severely scarred his self-confidence.

However, Istrone still spoke in a low murmur, "I feel that we should get rid of him right away. With our situation right now, it feels like this brat will bring us trouble—"

"Shut up, fool!" Chris, the old man, crudely cut Istrone off.

'This young man. If it was not for his attitude, he would not be a mere Blood Clan Knight in the Corleone family after three hundred years with his skills. Intelligent ones like Rolana have long since become Blood Clan Baronesses.'

Because of the old man's awe-inspiring presence, the blond noble took a step back in fear.

But it was too late.

Thales' heart jolted. He keenly caught onto this piece of information—

"With our situation right now."

'Does that mean that they're not in a favorable situation?

'Firstly, if they were mercenaries or allies of that big noble 'duke', having completed their task, they would at least be commissioned and rewarded by their employers. Why would their situation be unfavorable?

'Secondly, they did not hand me over to Blood Bottle Gang at the first opportunity. This might be explained by the fact that they are fighting against Blood Bottle Gang for that "duke's" favor.

'However, based on Istrone's words, they don't even plan on handing me over to the 'duke'. Therefore, are they planning to obtain the secret from me and use it for their own benefit? Then there wouldn't be many other possible explanations.

'They're not the "duke's" mercenaries or allies, but another independent force!'

Perhaps this was where his chance of survival lay.

Upon reprimanding Istrone, the old man did not say anything else. Instead, he stared long and hard at Thales, giving him immense psychological pressure.

The boy knew that he could not remain silent anymore.

'In that case, let me give it a go based on the inference just now.'

"I think," Thales chuckled, "that maybe we can sit down and talk, and exchange information among ourselves? Perhaps we will realize that we are actually allies."

Chris' countenance became darker. His eyes flickered like those frame skips in movies, and all of a sudden, he stood before Thales, just an inch away! He did not even ruffle the wind with his movements. Thales' heart pounded hard.

'I'll just pretend that I'm watching a ghost movie... in 4D.'

"This is a good idea, young sir. Let us exchange information, then." Chris flashed a hideous smile again.

The way the old man addressed Thales reminded him of Gilbert, and what he said made Thales loosen up. However, his next sentence changed that.

"And the information we have is that your meager life is in our hands."

Thales heaved a long sigh in his heart.

Such bad luck, encountering people who don't play by the rules.

Chris slowly raised his malicious, deathly-still gaze.

"And may I know about the information you have?"

As Thales frantically contemplated his next step, something unexpected happened.

Boom! Boom!

Suddenly, dull sounds produced by the banging of something heavy rang from the top part of the hall.

The three Blood Clan members collectively changed! Even the old Chris was not exempted from this!

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Another dull banging sound was heard. It came from the ceiling.

The three Blood Clan members exchanged glances. They were surprised and excited. It was as if something they had looked forward to for a long time was finally happening.

Thales saw all of this.

Chapter 27

‘Old Friend’

"The dead bodies of the eight swordsmen who were guarding Sir Thales, when the incident happened, were left here. This is not only out of respect but also because things were urgent. We did not touch them at all, and they are in the same state as they were when the incident happened."

Gilbert spoke to Jines, who was sporting a solemn expression in the corridor on Mindis Hall's second floor, in front of the eight dead bodies.

Whereas, Yodel stood quietly beside them.

"Six of them are highly skilled ordinary class swordsmen, with plenty of battle experience and had the potential to reach supra class. The other two were genuine supra class elites. All of them had their carotid arteries cut open by an irregular, sharp weapon."

Gilbert walked towards one of the dead bodies and squatted down, pressing on the dead bodies' neck. A hideous and horrifying wound was seen. The wound had changed color and the blood had hardened.

"Based on our tentative estimation, the person might be a supreme class elite. To be able to strike these eight people to death in a split second, that person has to possess ingenious skills and immeasurable strength. Even Yodel could not catch up to his speed.

"And the person also has a fearsome capability when it comes to hiding. As the intrusion happened, we guarded all the entrances and exits. However, he still managed to sneak in, and Yodel never noticed anyone there."

Gilbert speculated with a gloomy expression. He took out a mechanical watch from his bosom and looked at the time on it. It was six-thirty in the evening.

Even the moon was rising.

Jines' brows were tightly furrowed and her considerably charming lips were also tightly pursed, accentuating the beauty mole beside her mouth. She held her arms in both hands and was deep in contemplation for a while. She then suddenly raised her hands and made a clicking sound with her fingers.

"Take off their helmets."

Gilbert motioned the guards to do so with one glance, and the few guards beside them went forward at the same time and took off the helmets from the dead bodies.

Jines walked forward with her elegant high-heeled, female official boots and kneeled down on a single knee. She carefully observed each of their faces.

"Their carotid arteries were bleeding heavily. They wouldn't have had much time before they died, only enough for them to struggle for a while on the floor—This would be when they see the murderer.

"The expressions of every single one of them," Jines spoke carefully while bending herself down to observe, "are slightly different. These four are lying on their backs, and their expressions before dying were identical—rage, hatred, indignation, and vexation. It is possible that they did not have the chance to react at all before being dealt a heavy blow which killed them. Only those who did not know the truth up until they died would feel this sort of indignation and resentment.

"In contrast, these two are lying on their sides. Their expressions are shock, disbelief, and bewilderment. They probably knew that the murderer's deadly blow was coming and tried their best to strike back but to no avail. This made them shocked and confused. As they struggled on the floor, this expression was fixated on their faces.

"The last two were probably the ones with the highest capabilities. One is lying on his back and another is sitting against the wall. Their expressions are a lot subtler compared to the previous six people. For the one lying down, it is one of regret and pain. For the one sitting down, it was one of relief and resignation. They tried their best to strike back too but still failed. However, they are probably the last ones to die and were able to see the murderer while struggling on the floor. That was why before they died, they experienced regret and a sudden revelation. In other words, the two of them would have been able to effectively reiterate if they knew the enemies' identity beforehand."

Jines stood up wearing a cold expression and crossed her arms. While she looked at Gilbert who was appearing a little helpless beside her, she spoke with certainty, "The murderer is not a supreme class elite! If the murderer was someone from supreme class who is strong, to the point of being undefeatable, the last two people's expressions would be that of despair and terror. The murderer probably used a special skill, psionic ability, or device. He strategically attacked the strongest ones first before moving on to the six weaker ones. Hence, after the strongest two dropped down, they had the chance to see the murderer and his killing method.

"Even though the murderer had not yet reached supreme class, he is very fast. He is probably almost as fast as, or even faster than half the supreme class elites. But, as he is not yet in supreme class, when it comes to killing people, he still has to do it in sequence."

Yodel walked forwards and squatted in front of the dead bodies as though to verify Jines' words.

On the other hand, Gilbert looked at the woman in front of him in a daze. It was as though he was looking at the young, enthusiastic girl in the courtroom from twenty years ago... And the inexperienced, cheerful, young man who always stood behind her.

He sighed from the bottom of his heart and went in front of her.

"Lady Jines, I know that you used to be the most distinguished police officer in the capital city, had participated in the investigation of the royal family massacre during the 'Bloody Year', and also tracked the Air Mystic. Even the Kingdom's Secret Intelligence Department often commissioned your assistance. Your inference is extremely brilliant and as sharp as it used to be years ago. However, our urgent task at hand is to get that child back," said Gilbert calmly while placing his hands behind his back.

Jines contemplated and shot him a glance.

'The most distinguished police officer? She unknowingly clenched her fists. Police officer? Rubbish.'

However, the charming lady did not show any emotion. Instead, out of habit, she stroked the beauty mole on the right side of her lips with her left hand which was propped up on her right hand. She chuckled lightly. "Men are indeed the epitome of

carelessness and recklessness."

Gilbert narrowed his eyes and tipped his hat slightly to show his puzzlement.

"Have I not made it clear enough?" Jines lowered her hands and took huge, bold strides forward. She pointed at the dead body before her and spoke with confidence, "These two supra class guards were the strongest. They stood together and were the first ones attacked, these two were next, and the other four were the last ones in the assault. However, the order of their deaths was the opposite. The strongest two struggled until the end and saw the murderer. I only need to know the positions they were at before they were assaulted. Then, I can trace the pathway and identify the murderer's point of entry.

"The heavy amount of bleeding has mixed together all the bloodstains, making it hard to find the trail where the guards struggled on before they died. But based on the time the arteries started bleeding, and the time it took for them to fall and struggle on the floor, two circles can be drawn with the two strongest guards as the center. The two circles would be the range of movement of all the guards from before they were ambushed, up until their deaths.

"Do not forget that the two strongest guards were assaulted by the same type of weaponry at almost the same time. Which meant that they were standing together before they were attacked.

"Hence, the intersection point between these two circles would be the position where they were ambushed. But there are two circles, and thus, two intersection points. Only one of the intersection points is the answer—the true position where these two were assaulted, and the position from where the murderer intruded." With a focused look, Jines traced the shapes with her footsteps as she walked. What she had said made Gilbert and Yodel watch her solemnly.

"Based on the gaze of the two strongest guards before they died, after killing everyone, the murderer went to this position. I believe that this was also where the child stood.

"Based on the murderer's final spot where he revealed himself..." Jines walked towards the position and began taking steps back before continuing, "...and based on the order to which they were ambushed, we can find the path the murderer took." Jines slowly moved past those corpses before she returned to the two corpses who were formerly the most powerful of their group. "The end of the path connects the

region between these two circles. The closest one among them is this intersection point!"

Jines moved past these corpses that were scattered all over the place and eventually stood on one spot of the murder scene with a fierce look in her eyes. "This is where the two strongest were initially attacked. In other words, it was the spot where the murderer infiltrated, and also the spot where he first attacked from!"

Gilbert took a few quick steps forward before he looked around.

"Are you saying that the murderer appeared here suddenly?" He spoke slowly, "The mercenaries have indeed attacked up to this point, but that is impossible—this place is still very far from the stairs. The murderer had no place to hide when we were cleaning up the mess."

Jines let out another light chuckle that was filled with scorn. Only Yodel walked forwards quietly and pointed to a small decorative vase to the side.

This type of vase was commonly used in the corridors, but only this vase was closest to Jines.

Under Gilbert's puzzled gaze, Jines moved briskly forward and seized the vase before she smashed it without hesitation!

Clang!

She crouched down quietly and picked up a shattered piece of the vase. Once she had scrutinized it, she swept her finger across the inner side of the shattered piece lightly, then showed it to the two "useless men".

To his shock, Gilbert discovered that there was red blood on Jines' finger! Yodel crouched down as well and picked up a few of the shattered pieces—there were also tiny bloodstains on the inner side of the other vase pieces.

"He had nowhere to hide?" Jines let out a mocking laugh, causing Gilbert some embarrassment.

"So..." Gilbert received the shattered piece of the vase, and his expression changed. "This is..."

Jines stood up and with the voice of experience, said, "Number of victims: eight. Cause of death: bleeding of the carotid artery. Culprit: a supra class Blood Clan member, also known as a vampire. Murder weapon: the claws of a Blood Clan member..."

Just as Jines' was speaking excitedly, she was suddenly startled as she became aware of her current situation. So she gritted her teeth and swallowed the rest of her words.

'After all, I am no longer a police officer.'

Jines shook her head and cleared away all the emotions irrelevant to the situation. "So he infiltrated the manor and hid himself with his inborn ability to morph into blood, then with his gift of reaching maximum speed in an instant, he killed these people and kidnapped- Of course he didn't do it with his own abilities." Jines lifted her head and rolled her eyes at Gilbert. "This is the supreme class elite you spoke of?"

Gilbert was feeling incredibly embarrassed, but he knew that this was not the time for him to try and defend himself, which was why he decided to ask politely and amiably, "What an eye-opener. So, where is the child?"

'This is an eye-opener?' Jines thought scornfully.

'I knew it, you're one of those high-ranking nobles with a really narrow outlook on life. If you've seen Constellation's "Secret Intelligence Department", saw Eckstedt's "Dark Room", saw the Raven Robe Guards in Mane et Nox Dynasty, as well as Hanbol's "Kuntana", and when you've seen the methods they use, you will know just how many terrifying people there are lurking in the dark corners under the stage you stand on. Just a slight twitch of their fingers and they will know all your secrets.'

Then, with a sharp gaze, she said with certainty, "The crime- When the incident occurred, the sun had yet to set! He could only use Blood Guise to hide among the mercenaries!

"He is a Blood Clansman that hasn't reached supreme class yet. That is why he can only transform into liquid while using his Blood Guise, and he can last no more than half an hour in this state. This can only mean that the mercenaries had rushed here within a half-hour!

"A group of mercenaries is pressing onward at full speed. Only the Eastern City District where the nobles' manors are, the Town Hall, Merchants' Gathering, and the Central Region where the Renaissance Palace lies is half an hour away from Twilight District!"

Jines exhaled a sigh. This mature woman ended her deduction and moved an exploratory hand behind her waist out of pure habit, but found nothing there.

She was momentarily stunned before she started laughing bitterly in her heart. 'That's right, I'm no longer a police officer. I've even stopped smoking a long time ago.'

The trainee who always followed behind her to provide her a lighter had also long since changed into another person, had he not?

She heaved a sigh.

The sagacious lady stopped reminiscing and looked at Gilbert.

"Make your decision, Count."

Gilbert inhaled deeply and said, "The ones who will send someone to investigate will definitely be the nobles. The area in Eastern City District is not small, and the manors are the most suitable places to hide members of the Blood Clan! Even though there are quite a number of manors there..."

With one move, Yodel disappeared.

Gilbert choked back his words upon seeing his colleague's rude action. He could only heave a sigh. "Oh well, at least the search area is reduced."

Gilbert looked towards Jines and softly nodded to her. Jines only sneered at him.

Gilbert did not take that to heart, and instead, began ordering his people again. "Open the backup armory and reorganize the troops. Equip them with Silver Exorcism Swords! Pick thirty of the best fighters to follow me. Our destination is the Eastern City District!

"Bring the lamp along!"

.....

Boom boom! Boom boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The muffled sounds on the ceiling continued, and it was getting more and more vigorous.

Chris whipped his head around, wearing a slightly anxious expression for the first time. He looked at Thales with a hostile gaze and said to Istrone, "Send him to the dungeon and lock him up well!"

Then, without waiting for Istrone and Thales' reaction, the old man and Rolana disappeared together!

Istrone also wore a surprised expression. He lifted Thales up and, ignoring the other's struggles and screams, ("Hey, hey, what's going on! Aren't we about to exchange information, oh honorable Istrone?" -Thales) flung him towards the stone stairs.

In the following second, while he still felt dizzy, Thales fell head-first onto the wet stone floor.

Bang!

He grimaced in pain.

"Little brat! Stay here and be good! We will be able to hear whatever you are doing!" After an audible click from the key and Istrone's anxious words, the surroundings became silent.

Thales got up, feeling troubled but relieved. Istrone had disappeared.

So he quietly extended his hand to his lap and, while pretending to scratch an itch, cut his hand on JC's dagger which was tied there.

A surge of pain followed. His blood dripped onto the floor.

'It's here.'

Thales inhaled deeply, welcoming the burning sensation throughout his body.

'This way, I guess Gilbert and Yodel would be able to identify my position?'

He exhaled lightly and completely relaxed his body, but a sense of fatigue suddenly hit him.

The boy trembled as he crawled to a wall and propped his body against it.

'Today's experience will definitely not lose out to yesterday's trip to Red Street Market!'

It was only now that Thales had the time to observe the conditions around him. The lightning was dull, and it came from two minuscule torches. The floor was made of stone and was wet, cold, and hard. The mottled walls were full of scratches and marks, with a narrow, metal railing with huge locks as thick as an arm.

His feet kicked on some rusty shackles nearby and they made a ringing sound. Thales heaved a sigh and lied on the ice-cold floor.

'No doubt, this is a prison cell. It is wet, muddy, and filled with a bloody stench.

'A bloody stench?'

Thales could smell the foul and salty stench in the air.

It was similar to what he smelled in Red Street Market yesterday, but this was even stronger.

His heart tightened as frightening screams and moans echoed from outside his prison cell.

"Ah!"

Thales was so frightened that he stood up!

From what he remembered, he never had much tolerance for horror movies. It was always some person (whose name he could not remember) with terminal adolescent delusion syndrome who forcefully dragged him along to watch them together.

In what that person called 'training his bravery'.

From the horrifying stimulation, Thales' mind began operating at an insane speed again.

'Prison cell.' Bloody smell. Blood Clan. Screams and moans.

Thales suddenly knew what place this was: It was the 'food cabinet' of the Blood Clan.

A wave of nausea hit him. Thales heaved another sigh. The number of sighs he had made these past few days were probably more than the water he drank.

As he was about to sit down, faint and ragged panting sounds suddenly came from beside him.

"Huh! Huh! Ah!"

He was so scared that he crawled a few steps in the opposite direction.

Please stop scaring me.

On tenterhooks, Thales patted his chest, then he realized that his prison cell was not a luxurious single room.

Thales slowly inched towards the source of the panting sound. Under the dim light, he could see a human form, lying on the floor wearing heavy shackles, panting painfully.

"Ugh..."

In the dark, it was as though the prisoner could not speak. He only panted continuously, his voice full of pain and suffering.

His wrists were tightly secured by the shackles, and there seemed to be a tube that ran from inside the wrist to outside the cell.

Thales knew what that was.

Istrone had once said this, "In my opinion, we should just connect the phlebotomy device and nutrient canal right away, and then put him in the coffin."

Seeing this, there was no doubt it was phlebotomy device.

"Ha..." Thales lowered his head and helplessly heaved a sigh yet again.

It's probably some poor soul who was kidnapped here by the Blood Clan and became their food source.

"Ugh... Ugh..." As though sensing that someone had arrived, the prisoner struggled and moaned.

Thales felt another wave of nausea. Due to nausea, he decided that he had to do something.

"I'm sorry, this might hurt a little, please bear with it for a while." He softly said to the poor prisoner.

The boy extended his hand and held the prisoner's waist. Grabbing onto the thick phlebotomy device, he pulled off a needle with all his might, forcing out the needle that had been buried a few inches deep inside the prisoner's blood vessel.

"Ah! Ugh..." The prisoner's struggling and moaning intensified. He kept making indecipherable noises, like a mute.

Thales pressed onto the wound on the prisoner's wrist. Fortunately, there was not much bleeding.

'Of course, it's possible that he didn't have much blood left to begin with,' Thales thought dejectedly.

When dealing with the three Blood Clansmen just now, although Thales felt anxious and terrified, he had never felt weighed down by sadness.

But instead, seeing this chained up "source of blood" had, for some reason, made him start to have a heavy heart.

'Perhaps it's out of pity,' he thought self-deprecatingly.

Thales touched the shackles, and only then did he notice that it was a mechanical shackle made of dull black stone. It was covered with carvings of complicated patterns and words, heavy but intricate. It secured the prisoner's arms over his chest in such a manner that he was forced to cross his arms. Two clamp locks extended upwards and tightly clamped the prisoner's two cheeks, making him unable to turn his head. Pushing it with all his might, Thales realized that this heavy mechanical shackle was either secured to the floor or was so heavy that it was as if it has been secured to the floor.

It seemed like a heavy shackle specially prepared for elites.

Thales felt for the hasp and found it. It was made of some kind of special metal.

At that moment, the metal suddenly increased in temperature. A burst of searing heat went through the lock.

"Ah!" Thales involuntarily cried out in pain and let go of the hasp.

The boy frowned and tried touching the hasp again... Upon contact, the hasp would flare up with high temperature. It looked as if he had no way of unlocking the shackles. The prisoner's struggling slowly decreased.

Looking at his painful struggling and suffering, Thales felt extremely uncomfortable. However, he could only quietly retreat to the side and sit against the wall.

As Thales moved, the light from the torch outside the prison cell was no longer shielded and shone directly on the prisoner's face. Thales saw the pitiable person clearly. His body was covered in wounds. The grey clothing on his body was torn and filthy.

He was also handicapped. His legs were gone from the knees down. His neck was even scarier, the flesh and blood there had all meshed up and was a terrifying purplish-black color. It was as though his throat suffered a grave injury. That was probably the reason he could not talk.

Thales touched his own neck. Recalling his two experiences of being strangled and the pain that came with it, he could not help but shiver.

Looking at the prisoner, he thought quietly. 'What a pitiful person. To be able to live up until now with all those injuries, it is quite a miracle.'

The prisoner's expression was exaggerated. As he panted, his facial features twisted, as if enduring a great pain, but he could only make rough moans.

His short green hair covered half his face.

A weird tattoo covered the other half of his face.

"Unh..." He continued moaning in pain.

'Wait.'

Thales was suddenly stunned. He recognized the tattoo on the person's face.

Thales was suddenly aware that this person sharing the prison cell with him, panting and unable to talk, was an 'old friend' of his.

It was an 'old friend' whom he and Jala had just bumped into at Red Street Market the day before...

Midira Ralf.

One of the best in Blood Bottle Gang's Strongest Twelve. The Psionic who was an expert in manipulating the wind.

Supra class elite...

"Phantom Wind Follower"—Ralf.

Chapter 28

The First Mystic Ability Test

What does despair feel like?

Ralf felt that he knew the answer to this question.

That immense pain when his larynx was shattered and torn apart by that female bartender from the Brotherhood (he did not know Jala's name yet) made him feel as if it happened just five minutes ago.

And ever since then, it was as though he endured that pain every single second. Blood flowed in reverse from his throat into his lungs. The immense pain was transmitted to his brain from his throat. Even his airways were blocked.

He was unable to speak.

He was unable to breathe.

He was unable to move.

It was as though he was a heavily injured and dying stray dog that had simply been abandoned on Red Street Market.

Whether he eventually dies from pain, suffocation or choking, his hours are numbered.

The only thing that urged him to stay alive was his desire for life, which was born within him when he was roaming the streets of Camus Union during his childhood.

As a Psionic who controls the wind, he repeatedly used his psionic ability to push mouthful after mouthful of air full of dust, blood, and filth into his torn throat towards his lungs, as if he was squeezing a sponge.

He then squeezed out the exhaled breath from another wound on the back of his neck.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Every single 'breath' was accompanied by an immense, inhuman pain. It was like the sort of suffering one goes through when going back and forth between hell and earth.

'I'm probably the first person to ever extend life using one's psionic ability,' Ralf thought with sorrow.

Ralf felt that his current condition was very similar to the stray dogs that lived by gathering rubbish in sewers.

The female bartender left.

The cop left.

A few groups of thugs walked past his heavily injured and dying body.

A scout turned him over and felt his mouth and nose for any breath.

An earth-shattering explosion traveled into his ears.

Ralf did not care.

He could only instinctively 'breathe' in mouthful after mouthful of air using his psionic ability under the immense pain.

He did that until daybreak, when Noumea, who was retreating in panic, hoisted up his 'dead body'.

Noumea used to be a village hunter and was regarded as the coward among the Strongest Twelve. Ralf had always looked down on him, and the Phantom Wind Follower's favorite pastime was to ridicule, insult, and bully him in the Brotherhood.

The most ironic fact was that in his last moments, this coward whom he had always scorned was the one who took care of his 'dead body'.

Ralf was jolted awake by the immense pain that came from his legs.

His hands were tightly bound. When he opened his eyes, he was at the mortuary of the police station.

Then he saw Nikolay.

The head of Blood Bottle Gang's Eight Cadres (Ralf did not know that five of them died during the battle on Red Street Market), Nikolay the 'Red Viper'.

However, Nikolay only stared at him with a complicated gaze and shook his head disdainfully and with a fierce expression on his face.

"You are one of the few people from Blood Bottle Gang who survived," the Red Viper said airily.

Ralf struggled, wanting to speak while enduring the pain in his throat, but he could only make nonsensical "Huh, huh" sounds.

He felt a flare of immense pain on his knee.

However, he could not feel anything below his knees.

"Look at you, Ralf. The best one and the only supra class elite among the Strongest Twelve."

"The young man with endless glory, who was proudly recommended by Lady Catherine to the Air Mystic."

The Red Viper softly tapped his face, gaze still complicated and full of hatred. He said mockingly, "Now, you are lying here like a dead body, unable to speak, unable to breathe, unable to move, and unable to eat. Why are you still alive?"

The Red Viper arched his brow and his countenance became hideous and frenzied, "Why did you survive instead of Kirks, Song, Sven, or Dorno? Why was it you? Why was it Catherine's follower who survived instead of mine?"

Ralf widened his eyes, struggling with anger and pain. However, the immense pain and injury that came from two spots of his body prevented him from moving.

The Red Viper quelled his anger and instead started laughing loudly. He laughed jubilantly, happily, and insanely.

"Blood Bottle Gang suffered huge losses, and my forces were also considerably damaged," he said softly. "If all of Catherine's personnel were still around, she might be able to be promoted while using me as a stepping stone. This is a possibility."

Nikolay's expression became hideous.

"However, how would a Phantom Wind Follower who can't talk, has no legs, is injured and on death's door, be of her service? That's why..." Nikolay extended his hands, and with a twisted face, squeezed the wounds on Ralf's knees that had been cauterized to stop the bleeding. "Why don't you just die in battle and disappear?"

"Unh..." Ralf shut his eyes tight in the midst of the immense pain and struggled with all his might, although his body could not move due to the heavy injuries. He did not do so to break free but to alleviate the pain in his knees.

Even the psionic ability to control the air that he relied on to 'breathe' was almost halted.

"My mood is really bad today. While cleaning up the mess, I faced obstacles everywhere." Nikolay heaved a sigh and continued speaking, "But after getting rid of you, a genius well-regarded by Catherine, I'll feel very happy."

Seeing the hatred, pain, and anger in Ralf's eyes, Nikolay sported an apologetic and resigned expression, he smilingly said, "There was no choice; they especially requested for a supra class elite and even emphasized that the wrists must be intact for them to obtain blood. Otherwise, I would really have liked to chop off your hands instead of your legs."

In the end, he tapped Ralf's face and spoke beside his ear in a deep voice, "I hope that you get along joyfully with the vampires."

As Nikolay's footsteps faded, two Blood Bottle Gang thugs walked up to him. One of them held a three-inch-long needle attached to a tube. The other grabbed Ralf's lethargic wrist.

At that moment, Ralf felt great despair.

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Thales watched Ralf in a daze.

He had the urge to ask him about what happened to Jala after that, and about the result of their battle. Did Jala escape? Why was Ralf in this state? Was he not part of Blood Bottle Gang?

However, Thales hesitated, because he saw Ralf's current state.

The legless man's gaze was unfocused, and he could only convey his emotions through meaningless groans. His gaze was a mixture of despair, pain, regret, and sadness.

Thales still remember the Ralf he saw the night before.

Ralf was frivolous, confident, arrogant, and possessed extraordinary skills.

He moved about freely in the unending gusts of violent wind, leaving behind his trademark laughter.

But now...

"Ha... Ha... unh..." Ralf shut his eyes tight and started moaning in pain again.

The Phantom Wind Follower who was once wilful, mean, and fearless, did not exist anymore.

His lips were greenish-black and dry, a clear sign of severe dehydration. However, Thales could not find any water. He was also not sure if Ralf could still swallow in his current condition. Thales did not know how Ralf was even able to breathe.

The boy could only sit by the side in a daze and watch Ralf suffering in pain while struggling to live.

The second year after he transmigrated, a female child beggar had both her legs broken by Quide. Before dying, the poor girl wailed all night.

At that time, Thales was still in a state of ignorance and had only found very few memory fragments. He was panic-stricken, frightened by the horror of reality, and could only hide and shiver in a hole in the wall.

Then he had slept and listened to the girl wail through the entire night with a muddled mind.

It was similar to what was happening right now.

Afterward, he sometimes wondered why he did not have more courage at that moment to end the girl's suffering.

Looking at Ralf's disfigured state, Thales' heart felt heavy.

'No matter how many wrongdoings one has committed, no one deserves this kind of torture,' he told himself.

In the end, Thales heaved a sigh and climbed towards Ralf's side. He softly said, "Ralf... Midira Ralf."

Although his consciousness was already slowly fading, at that moment, Ralf's pupils instinctively became focused.

'Who is this? Who still remembers me, a maimed person who is waiting to die?'

Thales softly drew out JC's dagger and slowly held it against Ralf's neck.

"I know that you are in a lot of pain right now, enduring torture and suffering that cannot be imagined by normal people. I can end your life and help free you from all of this."

Ralf's breathing, which was completed using his throat and his psionic ability, immediately became chaotic.

'Torture. Suffering.

'Escape?'

"However, I have to ask you seriously and carefully. Midira Ralf, are you willing to let me relieve you of your suffering like this? If you are willing, blink once. If you are not willing... I am only asking this once."

With a solemn expression, Thales waited for Ralf's reaction.

In the darkness, Ralf stared hard at the boy's hazy profile before him.

Escape.

Ralf felt immense pain from his throat to his knees. Every single 'breath' tore open the wound on his throat. Every struggle affected the part where he was amputated on his knees.

He was thirsty, hungry, cold, in pain, and in despair, which was to him, the most terrifying emotion.

He recalled the sensation of wind fluttering past his body, the first time he killed a person with his psionic ability, the first time he entered Blood Bottle Gang, the first time he received a reward from his superior, the first time he made himself a man on top of a frail girl's body, and the first time he saw the Air Mystic, as if he was on a pilgrimage.

He thought of the fear in his enemy's gaze, the submissive gaze of his compatriots, 'her' expression, full of praise, and the proud and satisfied upwards curve of his lips whenever he heard gossip about the 'Strongest Twelve'.

Those were past glories. And he has already lost all of those forever...

Had he not?

The next moment, Ralf's gaze became determined. He used all his might to activate his greatly reduced psionic ability and drew a 'breath' into his half-crippled body.

And then, the Phantom Wind Follower trembled. With all his might while enduring the pain from the friction of his cheeks against the clamp lock, he raised his head with every ounce of his strength and earnestly gazed at Thales.

He prepared to blink. He just needed to blink once.

Once.

And then, Thales saw Ralf's top and bottom lids move. They trembled and began moving towards the center.

Thales heaved a sad sigh in his heart and slowly clenched the dagger in his hand.

However, Ralf's eyelids only trembled and stopped in the middle of his eyes.

There was one sliver of space left, but his eyelids did not close together.

It remained that way for a long, long time.

The man who was once the Phantom Wind Follower saw a flash of a scene that was either familiar or unfamiliar to him in front of his eyes. There were barren fields and dirty mud roads full of stray dogs and flies—that was the countryside of Camus Union, where he fought to survive when he was young.

During that incident, he was fighting for a black piece of bread against a gang of stray dogs, even though that bread had almost been completely devoured by a swarm of flies.

'Those stray dogs were really fierce.' Ralf thought quietly in the dungeon. 'Their deafening growls, desperate bites, insane strength, however... ' Ralf subconsciously licked his upper teeth. 'That bread tasted really horrible.'

Thales saw that Ralf's expression was becoming distorted as it trembled.

His eyelids slowly relaxed, widened, and returned to their original positions.

Boom!

Like a leaking balloon, Ralf's head, which was between the two clamp locks and which he had raised with great difficulty, suddenly fell backward. The back of his head hit the floor.

In the end, he did not blink.

Thales silently exhaled and slowly lowered the dagger in his hand.

However, it was as if Ralf did not feel the pain on the back of his head and the cuts on his cheeks.

His distorted face began trembling, along with his head.

"Ung... Unh—"

These were not moans.

Thales could not help but be stunned.

He saw Ralf shut his eyes in pain, his countenance trembled as he allowed the colorless liquid to slide down from his eyes ceaselessly.

"Unh, unh..."

His voice was very depressing and sorrowful.

He was crying.

The Phantom Wind Follower. Once, he was a powerful and endlessly praised Psionic, man, and warrior.

Now, he was shedding tears and crying.

Was he crying because of his weakness, or was it because of the pain he was feeling?

Right now, he was just like a common person, a normal person, or even a slightly weak citizen.

He cried as if he could no longer bear with the burden of his pain. Thales could only watch in a daze.

He watched as the man who could not talk nor breath normally fell on the floor and cried violently after passing up the chance to be freed.

Thales turned away gloomily. However, he tightened his grip on the dagger in his hand.

Ursula, Ned, and Kellet.

The child beggars who died in the sixth house, who did not even possess a surname, appeared one by one before his eyes.

He thought of his plight and then thought of Gilbert and Yodel.

The boy furrowed his brows and lowered his head to look at his hands. The new cut felt familiar, just like the burning heat just now.

At that moment, it was as if something settled within his heart.

Thales drew himself close to Ralf's ear for the second time. "I understand," he said softly.

Ralf was still crying in a manner as if he was crushed by his burdens.

"Then, are you willing to free yourself from these shackles?"

Ralf's crying paused for a moment. It did not stop but slowly became softer.

The little girl with the broken legs, and almost every single child who died in the Abandoned Houses in the past four years, flashed in front of Thales' eyes.

Shrill cries and despaired wails rang from outside the prison cell again.

'This f*ck*ng world.'

Thales did not know what was inside the dungeon. However, his gaze when looking at Ralf became simpler and clearer.

And then, Thales looked earnestly at the Phantom Wind Follower who could not fly anymore and spoke with determination, "Free yourself from these shackles. And then, with this battered body, continue struggling in this world and strive to stay alive. See how much crueler the world can be. Are you willing?"

Ralf stopped crying.

He was unable to move his head. He could only move his gaze to look at the boy beside him in a daze.

He heard the boy speak slowly and clearly, "This might not be freedom. There may be a huge price to pay. You could even die immediately. As for me, I am only doing this for myself."

Thales then lowered his head and said slowly, "However, I can try and give you a chance, let you leave these shackles behind and struggle to live one more time. Are you willing?"

Ralf stared hard into the boy's eyes.

Although there were tears lingering in his eyes, at that moment, Ralf suddenly felt like laughing. He felt as if the pain in his throat and knees was slowly numbing.

'Those stray dogs.

'Those stray dogs that fought for the bread with him.

'Those stray dogs, in the end... '

Ralf managed to take a 'breath'. A strange burst of joy bloomed in his heart.

'In the end.

'They faced a tragic end.'

Ralf, who was lying on the floor, raised his gaze again while trembling and stared straight at Thales.

The next moment, the Phantom Wind Follower slowly blinked, clearly, in a manner that there was no mistaking his action.

Everyone has blinked their eyes countless times in their lives. These blinks were extremely insignificant.

However, Ralf had perhaps performed the most important blink in his life.

Ralf slowly lowered his head.

Thales smiled, a lot of the gloominess in his heart dispersed. He nodded curtly. "Alright, I understand."

.....

"At first, I thought Her Highness woke up ahead of schedule. But now, it seems like that is not the case."

Chris frowned tightly in a dim room on the second floor of Vine Manor.

Before him sat a network of countless blood vessels in a complicated pattern connected to a massive, brownish-black coffin that was as tall as a person—three

meters wide and six meters tall.

At that moment, an unbroken tremor shook the coffin from within. "I tried to connect to Her Highness' consciousness, but it still remains muddled and unclear. There was only hunger and killing instinct. No matter how I tried to communicate with and comfort her, it was still the same!" Chris put a tube of blood down, his countenance became more and more solemn. "If this continues, Her Highness will only use up her remaining strength and blood supply ahead of schedule!"

Rolana looked shocked. The red-headed Blood Clanswoman said anxiously, "There must be something that stimulated Her Highness, but we did not do anything!"

Chris' eyes were shining with a bright light. The previous still and lifeless expression in his eyes had now disappeared without a trace. The old man spoke resolutely, "Not us! Her Highness only began having this reaction five minutes ago. At that time—"

Chris' expression changed drastically. As if he suddenly thought of something, he turned his head and shouted to Istrone who stood behind him with a solemn expression.

"That young child! Even we can smell the fragrance of his blood from two floors away. With Her Highness' sense of smell, it would have been... Where is the young child?"

Istrone was anxious and agitated. Looking at the excited Chris, he answered instinctively, "Just now, it seemed he accidentally cut himself. Then he pulled off the half-disabled supra class' phlebotomy device and said some weird things. I didn't listen closely. And then he—"

The expressionless Chris did not continue to listen to Istrone's explanation. The vibrations and dull tapping sounds continued to resound from the suspicious coffin. The old man rudely and directly cut Istrone off. "Bring the child up. No, Isa, you stay here; let Rolana go." Looking at the gigantic coffin that was vibrating more and more vigorously, Chris' eyes shone with a strange light, as if there were sparks in them. "What Her Highness craves for... is his blood."

.....

"This plan is very risky." Thales calmly explained to Ralf who was on the floor. It was as if he had returned to the sixth house and was using everything at his disposal to protect those good, naive and innocent child beggars who had been suffering in hell

since they were born.

"However, it is more unwise to sit here and be vulnerable to capture while waiting for some miracle to happen."

Ralf only quietly watched the boy whose gaze was so very different from the average person. With effort, he took a 'breath'.

'That serious face of his,' Ralf smiled in his heart and thought, 'definitely isn't inferior to Big Sister.'

The Phantom Wind Follower was not aware that, after facing a choice between life and death, he felt a lot more at ease.

Thales continued to explain detachedly as if he was not the one who was speaking. "I don't know how much strength you have left, but I estimate that it wouldn't be a lot. And the capability of that old man... So, neither both of us taking a reckless risk nor passively waiting would be ideal for the situation now. Our best, and most opportune moment would be when my rescue army arrives. At the moment they break in—"

"You won't be able to wait for your rescue army, little mortal brat."

A cold female voice interrupted Thales.

Ralf's face immediately tensed up.

Thales was momentarily stunned. Then, he turned his head in disbelief and looked towards the door of the prison cell.

Rolana Corleone stood outside the door, wearing a good-looking equestrian suit. She seductively grazed her lips with the index finger of her slim and beautiful right hand. At the same time, she yanked the lock of the cell door open with her now turned fearsome, sharp, clawed right hand.

"Istrone told you before, right? That no matter what you do, we will be able to hear it, Young Sir who played a trick on Istrone."

As if mocking him, Rolana laughed lightly and, with her attractively slim body, took elegant and sexy steps from the open cell door into the prison cell. "Too bad. Perhaps, after you grow a few years older, even I will be seduced by you. But right now, you are

about to become Her Highness' fragrant and condensed energy drink. Perhaps the adorable Rolana would be able to take a sip too?"

Looking at Rolana, who appeared suddenly, Thales understood that she could subdue him at any time.

The boy heaved a deep sigh that seemed sincere and regretful.

"Ralf," he said mildly, without a trace of anxiety in his voice, "I need ten seconds."

'Ten seconds?'

Suddenly, Rolana felt uneasy.

She thought of Istrone who had been duped.

'What other cards could he have in his hands? The half-disabled supra class mortal creature who is trapped in the Night Wing Stone Lock?'

However, the cunning Rolana did not want to take risks. Her expression immediately became fierce and determined.

'This little devil, he's trying to make himself sound mysterious!'

In an instant, her attractive figure appeared before Thales' eyes.

'Wait till Her Highness sucks you dry into a mummy. See if you can still—'

But at that moment, a gust of strange, violent wind stirred up in the tiny prison cell.

Whoosh!

The fire on the torches swayed, and there were even a few times where they were almost extinguished.

The violent wind made Rolana stagger three steps backward. In deep shock, she immediately grabbed onto the bars beside her and stood her ground with all her might.

'Is this... psionic ability?'

'Impossible, it is impossible that this child is a Psionic.

'Then, it has to be... ' With effort, Rolana looked towards the supra class elite who was locked onto the floor beside Thales by the Night Wind Stone Lock. 'It has to be him!

'Surprisingly, he still retained some strength, even in this state.

'It's useless.' Rolana relaxed and thought cheerily, 'You are all locked up and heavily injured. Even if you have a psionic ability, how long can it last?

'On the other hand, that young trickster... Later, even if I have to risk being reprimanded by Chris, I still want to drink a mouthful of your blood first.

'I will definitely make sure I leave a deep impression of it on you!' Rolana thought furiously.

"Then, let's begin."

Thales looked in front of him, at Rolana who was impeded by the violent winds. With a serene expression, he turned his dagger over.

Ten.

Under Ralf's puzzled gaze, he grabbed the dagger's blade with his unblemished right hand.

Nine.

"Good luck to both of us," he said.

Eight.

'My first mystic ability trial.'

Seven.

'It starts now.'

Six.

Thales stared at the black, stone shackles that held Ralf, but Ralf's face was red. He stared fixedly at Rolana, and the violent billows continued to buffet.

With a cold façade, Rolana grabbed tightly onto the bars beside her. Her left hand began transforming into fearsome, bright red claws.

Five.

'I want to break his shackles,' Thales thought quietly.

'And save this man who has nothing left.'

Four.

'If it is just as I predict it to be... ' Thales recalled various life-and-death situations in his mind.

Such as when Quide's hand strangled his neck.

When Asda's hand slowly tightened.

And the bloody scene in his distant memory, as well as the gentle person who still harbored all those adolescent delusions who existed in his memory, and whose name he could not remember.

Three.

Thales grit his teeth and closed his eyes. His right hand abruptly grabbed onto the metal hasp.

A wave of burning heat appeared from the metal.

But he clenched his teeth and endured it.

Rolana felt something. She turned her head in shock as she realized that the grill she had grabbed onto was vibrating.

'What's going on?' the Blood Clanswoman thought anxiously.

'That half-crippled man, how strong is his psionic ability?'

Two.

Bang!

The bar, along with Rolana's hand, shattered into countless tiny pieces.

As Rolana, who could no longer stand steadily, pressed onto the severed wound on her arm and screamed shrilly, she was blown out of the dungeon by the violent wind summoned by the psionic ability in an instant.

One.

Rolana's shrill and crazed growl resounded beside his ears.

The burning sensation attacked her.

Zero.

'Light.' Thales thought with his now hazy consciousness, 'So much light.'

.....

In the room on the second floor with the huge coffin, Chris' countenance suddenly turned strange.

"What is Rolana trying to do?" he said coldly, looking at the gigantic coffin that kept emitting dull tapping sounds.

"Perhaps she's getting a taste of the food," Istrone answered carefully, he could feel the elder's anxiousness. He continued speaking, "Towards delicacies, she had always... No! They are—"

Istrone's words were cut off by something from the outside world as their expressions turned into that of shock.

Boom!

A loud bang that sounded like an explosion echoed from underground.

A cloud of dust burst in violently from outside the door.

The two Blood Clansmen, both young and old, changed expressions at the same time. Then, they exchanged glances.

'Something happened in the dungeon.'

The next moment, they appeared outside the manor!

When Istrone saw the scene in front of his eyes clearly, he opened his mouth wide in shock, in a manner that was completely uncharacteristic of him.

Under the moonlight, the supra class mortal creature without legs and who had a tattoo on his face, the man who was once the Phantom Wind Follower, Midira Ralf, was seen to have escaped from all his shackles.

He was flying in the sky by riding on the violent winds while holding the little mortal child tightly under his armpit with a determined expression on his face.

.....

Not far away, while Gilbert was riding a horse and leading thirty Swordsmen of Eradication who charged at full throttle, his expression changed.

"Bloodline Lamp." Amidst the whirling sound of the wind, he spoke in a low voice to the female official beside him.

Jines, who was galloping along with her horse, looked at the Bloodline Lamp in Gilbert's arms with a solemn expression.

The flame of the lamp became red.

It was slanted.

"That direction—" Gilbert recalled. His expression was solemn.

"It's Covendier Family's Vine Manor!"

The female official growled angrily and whipped her mount.

"Who cares about which family it belongs to? Even if we are facing the Eckstedt's Walton family..."

"...we still have to break in!"

Gilbert nodded, a determined and fierce expression appearing on his face.

"All teams, change direction and follow me! No need to preserve horsepower! Charge forward with increased speed! Prepare for battle!"

Chapter 29

The Hand that Reached Out From the Coffin

Ever since Asda disappeared, Thales had not truly tried out that power of his, which he had apparently 'lost control' over.

He did not know how Mystics control their powers. He did not even understand how mystic energy worked. He was only modeling the scene to be as similar as possible to his last experiences of 'losing control', based on his earlier induction and inference, and tried to put his power to use.

Originally, in Thales' plans, this power was supposed to be probed and investigated step-by-step in secret and when he was safe. It was also supposed to be done in his calm and safe living environment after he gained a rough understanding of the origins of 'Mystic Abilities' and 'Mystics' from Gilbert's lesson; and after he considered the reaction of the people around him regarding him 'losing control' over his power.

However, due to the impending doom and Ralf's utterly miserable condition, he decided to start this 'mystic ability test' which might bring about danger in advance.

Blood had acted as a medium with the previous two times he 'lost control' by bringing the dagger, which was a material object, and the mysterious sphere, which was an energy, before him in a mysterious manner. Hence, he made a tentative guess that the power might be related to dimensional teleportation.

As long as I can shift the stone shackles' hasp to the side of my hand. Thales silently uttered in his heart...

The process of the experiment was easier than he expected.

The burning sensation inside his body became stronger and stronger. The stone shackles became even larger right before his eyes. More and more scenes appeared in his mind.

Then Thales lost consciousness.

When he opened his eyes, he felt the moonlight, heard the sound of the wind, felt the cold, and saw the extremely shocked Blood Clansmen on the ground.

Whereas he was already held in Ralf's bosom, and beneath his feet, the ground became further and further away.

Even though the process was a little strange, Thales thought tiredly, looks like the experiment was successful.

Although Ralf cut a sorry figure and was in pain, he had already escaped the burden of the heavy shackles. He forcefully manipulated the wind and drifted upwards.

No one was more shocked than Chris at that moment.

"How was that possible?" the old Blood Clansman muttered with a dull gaze.

Istrone and Rolana were still young, so he was the only one who knew that the 'Night Wing Stone Lock' used to lock the supra class elite in the dungeon, was an heirloom of the Corleone family that had been passed down for almost a thousand years. It was an instrument of torture that belonged exclusively to Blood Clan Dukes. Only the fresh blood of the person who closed the lock could open it.

That lock was used to restrain supreme class elites! It was originally used to prevent the deranged Highness from going into a frenzy. After Her Highness' condition stabilized, it was used on the supra class blood source. Even the most advanced Mystic Gun could not destroy those shackles! How did they open it?

Before attaining such grave injuries, Ralf was favored by the wind. He could even lie on his back with his limbs facing up for five minutes while he was ten meters high in the air with the flow of the wind.

But now, after having a considerable amount of blood drawn out, he was extremely weak. He was also tired and parched. The fact that he suddenly lost both his legs also affected his balance. The immense pain in his throat distracted him. The psionic ability he was so proud of was mostly used to maintain his 'breathing' where the air was transferred from his throat to his lungs.

He knew that he had no chance of victory against the three Blood Clansmen and that what Thales had just initiated was only a temporary measure, which was supposed to be a backup plan. Hence, after Ralf escaped the shackles, the only thing he thought of

doing was to continue rising with the help of the wind to a height that the Blood Clansmen cannot reach. If they managed to catch up, he would use all his might to whip them off with violent gusts.

However, he still underestimated Chris who had been a supreme class elite since hundreds of years ago.

Chris did not let his shock slow down his movements. His age of a thousand years made him even stronger. His dried-up façade grew dark and in an instant, he jumped and instantly reached a height of ten something meters away from the ground before he pounced on the people in the air!

For Her Highness, I must snatch that young child back!

In an instant, he had drawn close to Ralf. He could see a gust of strong wind rushing towards him.

With shock, Thales saw Chris whose clothes and hair were ruffled by the strong winds, and with an indifferent face, he transformed into a blood-colored mist.

It was not liquid blood like what Istrone became, but a blood mist.

Thales saw the blood mist scatter as Ralf blew on it. However, it continued spreading upwards and passed through the protective screen of strong wind built by Ralf without any obstacles.

The blood mist seeped through the wind and arrived in front of Ralf. Under Ralf and Thales' solemn gazes, it slowly transformed back into the pale-faced, old man, who had an expression on his face that was difficult to read. The old man began falling again.

"Ah—" Ralf could not speak, and could only growl furiously. He raised his left hand and strengthened his psionic ability, trying to blow the old man from the sky.

But before he finished growling, Chris Corleone's hand had already grabbed Ralf's left wrist.

"Those born without wings should not dream of flying." Chris' tone was a lot colder than the high-altitude temperature as he spoke eerily.

Snap!

"Unh—"

The sound of Ralf's bone snapping and his painful howl rose into the air twenty-something meters above the ground together.

And then, Istrone, who was on the ground, and Rolana, who held her half-regenerated arm as she rushed out of the dungeon with a dirt-covered face, saw Chris seizing Ralf—who held Thales to his bosom—by the left hand and then dragging Ralf and Thales towards the ground with fearsome strength.

"Ah—"

Ralf looked as if he had gone crazy. With all his might, he drove the wind upwards, almost forgetting to 'breathe'. But he still could not shrug off Chris' sharp claws which had pierced through his carpal bones and tightly restrained his wrist.

Thales was buffeted by the strong winds to the point that he could not open his eyes. His whole body was devoid of energy and he had used up all available cards at his disposal.

The boy had long-since become incapacitated.

Finally, Ralf who fought adamantly was inevitably dragged down from the sky by Chris.

Ralf lost his balance. Having exhausted almost all his strength, he tried his best to manipulate the wind, but Chris' great strength made it impossible for him to rise into the air again.

"For Her Highness, the young child must be kept alive!" Chris said coldly as he descended from the sky, holding on tightly to Ralf.

With a face full of hatred, Rolana licked her teeth. She extended her newly regenerated arm and smiled, preparing to catch the child.

Istrone had a stronger perception compared to her. As he stood beside her, his expression changed, and he abruptly looked outside the main door of the manor.

There, an intense vibration was approaching.

"Rolana—" Istrone spoke with slight anxiety, but Rolana kept her full concentration on the two people in the air.

Thales did not dare open his eyes, but the increasingly swift sound of wind and the heightening sense of weightlessness indicated that things were going badly.

Did he still end up making this move too early due to the sudden, unforeseen circumstance?

Ralf had already given up trying to shake off Chris' hand.

Looking at the moon that was getting further and further, and at the approaching ground, Ralf's gaze slowly became filled with clarity, brightness, and relief.

At that moment, Ralf suddenly realized that after experiencing so much suffering, the fracture in his wrist was not really painful at all. The corners of the Phantom Wind Follower's lips curled into a smile that had been absent on him for a long time.

What a pity, child. Thank you for the chance you gave me. At least I did struggle. As for those vampires, they won't have the chance to touch you.

It was as if time slowed down.

And then, Rolana, who was preparing to catch Thales on the ground, saw in shock that the half-crippled Ralf began howling and growling the instant he was about to hit the ground.

With one hand, he threw Thales using all his strength towards the direction of the Manor house.

"No!" Chris growled furiously and gracelessly. Ralf, who now had a free hand, grabbed onto Chris' waist tightly and hurled him towards the ground.

Thales could only feel his downward momentum changing as his body involuntarily flew towards another direction.

In an instant, the stone wall of the house appeared before him, becoming closer and closer. His head was about to crash into it.

Thales could only shut his eyes tight.

Is it going to end just like this?

However, to the boy's surprise, the miserable scenario where his skull would shatter into pieces did not happen.

His momentum was suddenly halted and his head felt dizzy. He then dropped into a steady and safe embrace.

Boom!

Ralf and Chris fell hard on the ground. The huge impact even smashed and broke the ground. Dust swirled in the air of the open space outside the manor.

Rolana's expression changed drastically. She went for Thales, who was flying in the direction of the house. Her figure flickered and reached him in an instant whereas Istrone looked at the manor's main door with a grim gaze. As his eyes sparkled, his voice rang through the entire manor in the quiet night.

"Enemy attack!"

Thales dizzily and slowly opened his eyes in the arms of a person which felt familiar and strange at the same time.

In front of him were two dark-colored lenses on a dark-purple mask. They looked towards him under the moonlight.

"Do not worry, Thales," Standing on the second-floor balcony of the manor house, the royal secret protector, Yodel Cato, spoke hoarsely with a slight tremble in his voice, "you are safe now."

Thales smiled tiredly with relief. He closed his eyes and became completely at ease.

Waves of vibrations densely packed with one another rang clearly from outside.

Boom!

The main door of Vine Manor was crashed open.

Countless hoof beats rushed in.

"In the name of Constellation's Supreme King, Kessel Jadestar!" Count Gilbert Caso's steady and sonorous voice rang above the dust and hoof beats. "All present personnel in Vine Manor are suspected of being involved in the theft and subsequent hiding of a royal treasure!"

"Surrender now and do not resist! Whoever disobeys will be killed where they stand!"

.....

In a dark chamber with only boundless darkness and not even a single torch, two breathing sounds that seemed faint and indistinct could be heard.

"What a pity, this is probably the closest we have been to the Air Mystic in the past twelve years," an aged and acrid voice spoke.

"However, all information showed that someone has gotten rid of Asda," a light and clear male voice echoed.

"Then let me guess, you, who think someone has 'gotten rid of him', has probably also read about how Mystics are immortal?" the old and acrid voice mocked.

"Don't be so stern, teacher." The light and clear voice continued speaking, "At the very least, he has been sealed."

"The problem is, who, in Eternal Star City right now, has the capability or weapon to seal Asda?" the hoarse, drawling voice continued the question.

"It must be none other than those few," the light and clear voice spoke playfully.

"True. Ha..." The hoarse and acrid voice seemed to have a hint of disappointment as it echoed in the air, "It's none other than them, only those few."

"You do not have to continue investigating the truth regarding the Red Street Market incident anymore. All records—including those regarding the massive explosion in the central area, and the witness report of that woman who was piggybacking a child—shall be sealed permanently.

"As for Asda Sakern... Make full preparations. The Paramount Sword is not complete. Whether it takes ten or twenty years, the Air Mystic will eventually return," the hoarse and acrid voice ordered sullenly.

There was a long silence.

"Don't make that face, teacher. To think of it positively—we have lost one arch enemy. To think of it even more positively—we might be able to draw out the Blood Mystic," the light male voice spoke languidly.

"Don't pretend that you can see my expression," the hoarse and acrid voice said with dissatisfaction. He then heaved a sigh. "The Blood Mystic. Ha... this accursed fate. The capital city will probably be in chaos again soon. Twelve years ago, at least I had Lance, Jines, Thysen and Lanzar Nov beside me. Now, the only manpower I have is you." The hoarse voice's sigh was filled with solitude and loneliness.

"However, twelve years ago, even though you were all there, the late king still died, didn't he?"

"Obviously, strength is not the key—luck is." The light voice seemed to talk about the tragedy twelve years ago without any qualms.

In the dark, both voices were silent for a long time.

"Yes, even with what we had twelve years ago the late king still died." The hoarse voice finally answered. This time, his tone seemed to be full of grief and indignation.

"By the way, 'Secret Room' sent someone to pass us an anonymous letter. The letter said that yesterday, a member of the gang was spotted leaving Eckstedt and departing for Constellation, towards Eternal Star City. The old woman who delivered the letter also said that the letter was to pay a debt of gratitude towards you." The light voice seemed to finally realize the odd atmosphere and stiffly changed the topic.

"Ah, the long-anticipated collaboration between the Secret Intelligence Department and the Secret Room." It seemed that the interest of the hoarse and acrid voice was piqued. "Coming to the capital city at this time? The Blood Mystic?"

"No. I've sent some people to investigate it. It appears to be a doctor from Black Street Brotherhood, Ramon."

"He's problematic?"

"Somebody saw him perform a 'little trick' while on a village path."

"Little trick?" The hoarse voice finally became solemn.

"Yes, a 'little trick'," the light male voice replied with cynicism.

"After I read through everything contained in the deep knowledge reserve in all twenty floors of the Jadestar Library, my conclusion is that, for this 'little trick' that can heal wounds in an instant, a thousand years ago, it was known as—"

His light voice immediately became deep. "Magic."

His voice slowly faded away. Only then did the darkness in the chamber truly sink into a deathly-still silence, like a cemetery at midnight.

After a long time, the old voice said, "That old woman." The hoarse voice chuckled lightly. "I can't believe she gave me this information as a debt of gratitude. She is indeed as cunning as she always was."

Gilbert led the guards—consisting of Swordsmen of Eradication—and they all rode on horses as they barged into the manor.

They surrounded the three members of the Blood Clan!

"Unsheathe the silver swords, prepare to fight the enemy!" Gilbert said nothing more. He knew that his declaration of "sparing those who surrender" earlier was merely a formality.

Often, the only effective methods are strength and weapons. Just like diplomacy.

"Rolana!" Istrone avoided two sword blades that had immediately attempted to take his head in a flash. He shouted anxiously and furiously, "Summon the Shadow Guards!"

Rolana landed on a window on the second floor. She was extremely furious; neither her unparalleled body nor devastating sharp claws could do anything to Yodel, who kept appearing and disappearing from view while he held Thales in his arms. She was also aware of the situation at hand, which was why she decided to spread her arms wide open and emitted voiceless howls with a strange rhythm towards the direction of the dungeons.

Boom, boom!

Suddenly, quaking sounds that were packed so closely to each other that they sounded like thunderstorms boomed from the dungeon.

Gilbert's expression changed. He decisively waved the long sword in his hand. The swordsmen beside him shouted loudly in unison.

But it was too late. A black swamp suddenly burst out the entrance of the dungeon. It dashed towards the horse formation formed by the thirty Swordsmen of Eradication.

"Form a ring!" Gilbert saw the thing dashing towards them clearly, and shouted loudly with a ghastly expression, "They are blood slaves!"

The thirty Swordsmen of Eradication who were all at least above ordinary class also saw the things dashing out. The black swamp was made up of creatures with frenzied faces and blood-red eyes.

Almost all the swordsmen present were guards with plenty of experience on the battlefield. They knew what the creatures before them were.

They were Blood Clansmen that belonged to the lowest and most inferior class in the clan. They were originally humans or other races who had then received the blood essence of Blood Clansmen and transformed into hungry, frenzied, and loyal blood slaves who are unafraid of death.

More than ten blood slaves swarmed towards the horse formation like a flood.

Gilbert assessed the situation clearly. He knew that Thales was already safe, but relying blindly on horsepower and dashing towards these fearless creatures would only increase their casualties.

"Stand still!" he ordered loudly.

"Whoa!"

The thirty Swordsmen of Eradication yelled angrily. They dismounted and formed a round formation quickly. All the guards stepped out with their left foot and slanted the swords on their right, protecting the person beside them.

This was the defense formation Constellation was famous for, the Returning Light Formation!

At that moment, a figure slowly stood up from the hole smashed by Ralf and Chris.

And then, in the blink of an eye, the figure disappeared in a flash.

"Please wait here for a moment and take a short rest." Yodel put Thales down on the second-floor balcony lightly. He saw Chris, whose figure showed up in the dust, and also his subsequent disappearance. "We will take care of the rest." Then Yodel disappeared in front of Thales, too.

The next moment, Yodel's dark-colored short sword with that crisscrossing cross-guard appeared in the air. It clashed fleetingly with Chris' sharp pair of claws as he dashed towards the second floor, producing a spark.

Clang!

The jarring sound pounded on everyone's eardrums. But there were strangely no collisions of air were formed due to the clash of their weapons.

Yodel and Chris can be considered as the two best supreme class elites in the Western Peninsula. Having dueled once, they had roughly understood each other's capabilities. They moved away from each other.

"This is the ability to move through shadows!" Chris' countenance was cold. He dug his right claws into a wall of the first floor and secured himself onto it.

"As someone who is at the peak of supreme class even if it's in Constellation, you shouldn't have been a nobody. Is it because you are shielded by the overly brilliant rays of The Kingdom's Wrath?" the old man said coldly. He was totally unconcerned with the battle between the blood slaves and the guards. It seemed that all his energy was focused on Thales, who was on the second floor.

Yodel did not say anything, nor show any emotions as usual. His mysterious figure was lightly perched on the panel of a window on the first floor, projecting an illusory quality. He looked unsteady, but he never fell.

In the courtyard, the blood slaves and the circular formation of guards were finally engaged in hand-to-hand combat.

Bam!

The first dull thud came from an intense clash between a blood slave and a guard.

The guard used the double-edged short sword beside his body to angrily slash open the blood slave's body. But the blood slave slashed open the guard's armor, completely indifferent of what would happen to its claws and nails.

The same scenario quickly happened at every part of the circular formation. The situation immediately became chaotic.

Amid the chaos, Thales noticed Rolana Corleone leaping towards him while growling furiously, but she was stopped halfway by a long, silver-colored metal chain that sliced through the air in a zigzagging manner and was forced to take two steps back.

"Your battlefield is here, blood-sucking whore!"

Following the furious words, Thales saw a black-haired woman around forty years old, wearing a suspicious, light-blue, female official uniform (he did not know her at that time). She angrily whipped the chain in front of Rolana.

Rolana chuckled coldly, and as she moved in a flash, tried to leap away from the area that can be reached by the chainsword. However, as she moved, the chain fell on her and wrapped around her neck tightly. The part of her neck that was entangled by the chain was even emitting a hissing, green smoke.

"This chainsword is made of silver, whore!" The female official, Jines, growled with an unpleasant expression. "I really threw in a lot of my savings to prepare a nice treat for you people!"

At that moment, with blood-red eyes, Istrone transformed into liquid blood and rose into the air, dashing towards Thales.

Clang!

Istrone growled angrily and, crossing his hands, which were in the shape of claws, deflected a silver sword that shot straight towards his chest.

"Sir!" Gilbert had dismounted and moved through the blood slaves while working with three Swordsmen of Eradication before he arrived at the door to the ground floor and stood firmly there. He looked at Istrone with a displeased expression and raised the silver sword in his hand, striking a standard pose one makes when inviting someone

for a duel. "Please stay away from that child."

The skirmish between the blood slaves and the swordsmen was still ongoing.

However, in the midst of his fatigue, as Thales watched the three Blood Clansmen, who repeatedly charged towards him but were continuously stopped by their troublesome opponents, the boy suddenly understood something.

What they want isn't me... but something on the second floor. He thought silently. They must have an Achilles' heel there.

The sounds of battle between the blood slaves and swordsman continued. The three Blood Clansmen and the three warriors were also engaged in fierce battle.

Having thought of this, with an uncertain and fearful gaze, but still full of determination, Thales abruptly pushed open the balcony door.

After pushing open the door, his weak body immediately collapsed inside the room.

Thud!

However, a dull and strange tapping sound attracted the boy's attention.

While panting lightly, Thales raised his head. Borrowing the moonlight from outside the balcony, he gradually saw the dim room clearly.

Especially the thing in the middle which was connected to countless blood tubes and covered with complicated patterns and obscure words...

It was a gigantic, black coffin.

Thud! Thud!

As if roused by something, the dull tapping sound within the black coffin grew more and more violent, and also increasingly fierce.

Thud! Thud! Bang! Bang!

Thales suddenly realized that his act of pushing open the door and entering was more or less a little careless. Until...

Boom!

An incredibly loud sound shot into the air.

Thales fell backward from the vibration and his eardrum rang.

As if there were some horrifying internal explosion, the cover of the black coffin abruptly shot upwards and fell onto the floor.

Holding his aching ears, Thales clenched his teeth and got up.

He saw that at some point, something had extended out from the edge of the black coffin which had lost its cover.

It was dried-up, charred black, and ominous...

...hand.

Chapter 30

Battle of the Supreme Class

Yodel instinctively felt that things were not right.

This was because after confronting and probing him for a short time, the Blood Clansman who attacked fiercely despite being old and gray-haired suddenly became passive along with his juniors!

They were no longer attacking, advancing, and disappearing in a frenzied manner anymore, neither were they manipulating the blood slaves with undetectable voices.

That was until Gilbert's voice spoke anxiously, "Yodel!"

Even though they did not usually get along well, Yodel immediately understood what Gilbert meant.

The masked secret protector raised his head. He saw Thales pushing open the door on the balcony that led indoors and disappearing into the darkness of the house.

Thales, why?

As the mechanical gears behind his Crystal Drop glass lenses started spinning, Yodel's field of vision rapidly zoomed into the second floor. However, the room was so dark that he could not see the situation inside at all.

Yodel's heart became restless. His figure disappeared in an instant.

In an obscure gray world, a gray moon slowly emerged. Next, a gray metal door appeared out of thin air, followed by a gray garden connected to it with gray walls, gray windows, gray houses, and other gray things.

In an instant, a gray Vine Manor that looked exactly like the Vine Manor in reality, apart from the strange coloring, appeared out of thin air in this world.

After an unknown amount of time passed, layers of ripples visible to the naked eye

appeared and propagated from a point in the sky like the water's surface when skimmed by a dragonfly, in a manner as if the sky was pulled away.

Finally, a normal-colored Yodel softly emerged into the gray world from the center of the ripple and trod the similarly gray Vine Manor.

He stepped onto the world that was almost the same as the real world in terms of the shape and structure of objects except that it was void of any signs of life, and began his gray, deathly silent journey. The masked protector expertly jumped from window to window and rapidly rose towards Vine Manor's second floor in the shadowy world.

He needed to hurry and reach the room on the second floor through this shadow-world.

However, when he was a few meters away from stepping on the second-floor balcony's stone handle, Yodel suddenly paused for a moment...

...because a moment ago, he felt as if someone had dropped a heavy punch on every corner of the gray Path of Shadows.

Resonance.

These two words appeared in Yodel's mind.

Such a familiar feeling.

He furrowed his brows slightly and aborted the climb.

In the next moment, like swift thunder, Yodel kicked the gray walls of the gray house hard with his left foot and soared into the sky like a swallow, then somersaulted towards the back.

Strangely, ripples in space [1] appeared a few meters below the gray balcony where Yodel had stepped on. It spread with the vibrations, collapsing all the gray house's walls around it. The ripples took on a horrifying blood-red color.

In an instant, the blood-red color swept over the thoroughly gray Path of Shadows. Yodel who was somersaulting in the air sighed in a barely noticeable manner. Transparent ripples in space appeared throughout his whole being.

These ripples on Yodel offset the blood-colored ripples that tried to attack him.

In a few seconds, he disappeared into space and reappeared in the real world.

Below the observation deck on Vine Manor's second floor, a large space in the air was shrouded in blood mist. The blood mist contracted periodically as if vibrating with order.

Yodel suddenly emerged amid this strange vibration!

After emerging, Yodel somersaulted, looked at the blood mist around him and frowned while he was in the air. It has been twelve years since someone managed to artificially force him out of the Path of Shadows again.

And it was through the same method used twelve years ago.

An ambush prepared a long time ago was waiting for him.

The blood mist stopped vibrating. A suffocating burst of air rapidly invaded, bringing with it countless droplets of blood.

The blood mist conglomerated into an aged, blood-colored right hand in the air, throwing a seemingly light palm strike at Yodel, who was airborne and had no strength. The strike was aimed straight at his chest and abdomen.

But before the strike approached, the clothing on Yodel's chest and abdomen emitted a mysterious hissing sound and fragmented into pieces one by one in the air.

Upon careful observation, it can be seen that the blood-colored palm was surrounded by tiny droplets of blood in the blood mist that corroded everything that blocked it.

For example, Yodel's heart. Since he was stuck in the air, he was unable to evade it. Neither could the Path of Shadows protect him anymore.

In the air, Yodel, who was faced with imminent disaster, could only calmly hide his chest and abdomen, curling his body into a weird shape to delay the palm's direct impact on it.

A little more than barely a second passed.

A lot of things happened in this period of a little more than one second.

The dark-colored short sword suddenly appeared in Yodel's right hand.

In the blink of an eye, Yodel waved the sword in his hand and made three continuous chopping motions.

None of the three attempts hit the dangerous blood-colored palm.

However, the gears behind Yodel's Crystal Drop glass lenses were spinning rapidly. The tiny droplets of blood in that blood mist that scattered all over the air manifested in his sight with nowhere to hide. Yodel's waving of the short sword had delivered a blow that caused a tremor in that terrifying blood fog, causing them to shiver so much that three ripples that could not be seen by the average human eye appeared!

The blood palm attacked without obstruction. One more second and it would hit.

The gears behind Yodel's lenses started spinning in another direction. The color of the Crystal Drop lenses changed together with his field of vision. The three ripples caused the blood mist around them to vibrate. Behind the blood-colored palm, a special blood droplet spun without order amid the vibrations.

The next moment, Yodel thrust his short sword at the disorderly blood droplets with an unbelievable speed.

Clang!

The tip of the sword gently touched the palm that was made of blood mist, and then quickly retracted. Not an ounce of strength was wasted, but not an ounce of energy was held back either due to his being miserly.

On the palm of blood mist, a medium-sized blood droplet vibrated and shattered.

Next, the blood-colored palm which had originally been fierce and threatening (and which would have hit Yodel's chest in zero point something seconds) collapsed into nothingness in an instant.

Yodel landed lightly on the ground. On the left side of his chest and abdomen, a piece of clothing that had been badly corroded and torn by the blood mist became fluttering ash. A concealed stretch of muscle was revealed, the skin on the surface was totally

corroded and fresh blood was oozing out of it.

On the other hand, the blood mist that filled the air conglomerated towards the back along with the bloody palm that fragmented. Chris Corleone's deadly-still figure conglomerated in front of Yodel once again. However, the conglomeration did not include his right palm.

Yodel ignored the wound on his chest, letting the blood flow uncaringly and soak the hem of his shirt until his muscles contracted on its own to prevent the corroded wound from bleeding any longer.

Chris furrowed his brows. With a flick of his right arm, a reddish, new, skeletal hand regenerated from his severed wrist, which was covered with blood mist. Then, sinew and skin regenerated on the skeletal hand at a speed visible to the naked eye.

Yodel's chest wound looked more severe, but Chris' newly regenerated right hand looked as good as new.

But a depressing cloud of emotions seemed to have filled Chris' heart. He knows. In the fierce battle between supreme class elites which would have decided their lives and deaths in an instant, the prideful immortal already lost to this mortal behind the mask.

Initially, Yodel disappeared into his Path of Shadows and vanished from this world, but he was continuing onward on the other side of the world.

But after that, Chris turned the omnipresent blood mist into millions of blood droplets that created a sudden burst in uniform resonance, forcefully blasting away the masked elite from the shadow that only he could use.

Yodel, whose path was suddenly cut off, fell into Chris' trap in mid-air. With the origin blood bringing it together, the blood mist, which had weak corrosion power fused into it, conglomerated into a more concentrated palm and attacked Yodel.

Yodel had nowhere to draw strength from, no way to evade, and no way of entering the shadows. He fell into an absolutely disadvantageous position.

However, in an instant, Yodel managed to win over a little more than a second by rapidly changing his position.

In this short amount of time, Yodel identified the position of the origin blood among the thousands of tiny blood droplets and destroyed it, at the same time-shattering Chris' right hand.

The victorious and defeated parties in this battle of the supreme class were hence decided.

Yodel only lost a palm-sized piece of skin and some venous walls.

However, under Yodel's sword, Chris lost a drop of origin blood that signified the Blood Clan's exuberant vitality, and which would take over a hundred years for a single drop to be formed.

Chris heaved a sigh. What an exceptional young man. He's a fearsome member of the younger generation.

"Such beautiful skills and astonishing instincts. I was ignorant to have compared you with 'The Kingdom's Wrath' earlier."

As he spoke, Chris' figure again flashed around and evaded Yodel's phantom-like thrust.

"Even 'The Kingdom's Wrath' would not have done better than you."

Yodel paid Chris no heed. Instead, he stepped hard on the floor and rushed towards a window on the first floor. However, Chris was, again, blocking the path in front of him.

"But you are powerless to turn the tables now." Chris moved and dodged Yodel's attack. At the same time, he held him back from moving to the second floor.

The immortal old man did not stop speaking, and his words were filled with the chilling observations that could only be possible from a person who had lived for a long time. "Based on that boy's age, he is probably the most intelligent and calm mortal I've ever seen in my six hundred something years of living."

Chris, who had lost a drop of origin blood, no longer hoped to kill or even defeat this opponent. All supreme class elites were dangerous people with great strength and high levels of skill but could control their power at will. With just an exchange of a few blows, these two already knew the direction of the fight and how it would end.

However, he could not let this person bother Her Highness while she feasted, especially when the mortal child could be the key to Her Highness' awakening.

"It's a pity that his curiosity and his sense of danger is too great. Even if he knew that there were reinforcements, he still could not resist taking the initiative and attack in an attempt to save and defend himself. He probably can't resist the feeling of his fate being in someone else's hands.

"We've only made a few feints before he keenly noticed that the second floor might be where our weaknesses lie. His curiosity and his sense of danger made him push open the door, unable to resist. What he did not know was, that place was precisely where we hoped he would go.

"Her Highness needs his blood and his power. Young man, you are already too late. That mortal boy has already become Her Highness' strength at this point." A brilliant light shone in Chris' eyes, and for the first time, he referred to Thales with respect and admiration.

Yodel's short sword trembled lightly.

.....

As Thales looked closely at the charred black hand that reached out from the strange black coffin, he froze for a whole five seconds.

He had an intense flashback that, again, invaded his every brain cells, summoning a scene from nowhere that felt like déjà vu.

He heard a voice, it was still that soft and feminine sound. This time, it was stern as it spoke, "Wu Qiren, your grip is hurting me! We're just revisiting the classics, is there a need for you to be so scared?!"

In Thales' ear, his past life's quivering voice during that time was filled with fear, "I thought it was something like 'The Godfather'...who knew you actually wanted to watch 'The Grudge' at midnight?!"

"These are classics worth passing on to the next generation, okay?! Look at Kayako, she's so adorable! Ack! Loosen your grip! My skin is tender!"

"God damn it, she- she- she appeared! You have larger breasts, cover me!"

"You only noticed my breasts are big now? What about usually- Argh! If you're afraid then close your eyes!"

"I can't help it! By the way, can we please turn on the lights now- Ah! She- she- she climbed down!"

"Wu Qiren! Be good and sit on the chair for me!"

"Damn it! Madam! Don't stop the movie at this moment! I need to go up and down these stairs every day, alright—"

The moonlight was blocked by the black clouds. In the darkness, the flashback of his past life that happened for no reason was interrupted by a terrifying roar.

"Roar!"

This voice was like a person who had been dreaming about drowning suddenly jolting awake from their suspended animation states. But to Thales, who had been severely tormented by the memories of his past life, no matter how he heard that sound, it was like a shrill howl of a thousand-year-old malicious spirit that had just resuscitated overnight!

Thales suddenly recovered from his absent-minded state when he realized in a daze that the ghostly hand that held on to the edge of the coffin was climbing out swiftly along with that terrifying roar.

A hand and wrist that looked like it belonged to a mummy. The small, charred black arm looked as if it was burned in hellfire; the badly damaged shoulder that looked as if it had been attacked by countless ants. All these things were revealed one after another outside the black coffin!

This ghostly hand and the "main body" attached to it, which was now practically no longer in human shape, were slowly climbing out of the black coffin!

That thing continued climbing out until a hair-raising skull appeared slowly out of the coffin under the dim moonlight.

This emaciated "skull" had dry, withered, long, white hair, and a rotten, charcoal-black face. It had a disproportionate, large, black mouth, and the spot where the nose was supposed to be was a layer of darkness where the bottom could not be seen!

Thales felt his goosebumps rise from his scalp before they traveled downwards and covered every inch of his skin right up to his fingertips.

Hidden by the white hair, "it" opened it's black, hollow "mouth", which was dark and gaping until the edge of the mouth reached right below its ears.

"Roar!"

Its shrill cry traveled into Thales' ears from the direction right before him. Thales felt his skin crawl, and he almost collapsed onto the floor like jelly.

This strange creature did not stop. It slowly but steadily crawled out of the black coffin as it fumbled about its surroundings.

From the head to middle of the body, from the left arm to the right arm; the "skull" finally crossed the edge of the coffin and fell face-down onto the ground. At last, that dry, ghoulish left hand lightly touched the ground.

Thales' mind became blank. He trembled, slowly sucking in a mouthful of cold air. At this time, the skull that was touching the ground seemed the sense something. It paused for a moment, turned towards Thales' direction and slowly raised its head.

The withered, white hair parted to the sides of its head, gently revealing its "face" directly to Thales.

Where there was supposed to be eyes, Thales instead saw—

Two irregularly large black holes.

The boy almost fainted from fright.

It looked like a mummy that was not completely burned. But it seemed like after the transmigration, his bountiful experience from the streets allowed him to be a lot more daring. Although Thales was afraid, he still managed to muster what remained of his rationale in his mind while shivering.

No matter what that thing is... Thales trembled as he quietly thought to himself, I must run! Even though it looks scary, it isn't fast. I just have to—

Thales tried his hardest not to think about the plots in the horror movies he watched

in his past life. Spinning on the balls of his feet, twisting the comfortable child-sized shoes that Gilbert specially prepared for him (even though it was largely worn out after all the running about he did), he prepared to depend on his speed to escape this dangerous place.

As long as I can last till Yodel's rescue... Thales thought, but the moment he moved his leather shoe, the ghoulis creature unexpectedly leaped out of the coffin!

It was as if a headless ghost that had been moving about without purpose suddenly regained consciousness!

"Uh- Ah!" The shrill cry resounded.

Thales, who was now utterly terrified, turned tail and ran!

Tap, tap!

The pale-stricken Thales took two steps towards the balcony!

Translator's Notes:

1. Ripples in space: Otherwise known as gravitational waves.

Chapter 31

Little Girl?

A question.

If a person saw Kayako[1] crawling down the stairs at a swift pace, how would he or she feel?

If anyone asked Thales that question at that moment, he would definitely answer in rage while crying, "He would definitely feel like how I do now!"

Because the ghost/mummy/monster ("Who cares what it is?! Is it important?!" – Thales, after he recovered from his fear) was dragging its incomplete and roasted body on all fours while crawling on the ground bizarrely at lightning speed!

'God damn it!'

Thales could practically feel his soul leaving his body in fear. He did not even think about whether this creature had any form of intelligence, whether it could talk, and whether they could talk it out, and not fight.

At that moment, as Thales ran around desperately in the small room, he could even feel his tears escaping uncontrollably from his eyes!

However, Thales soon came to regret his decision.

There was no other reason; the speed of the monster that looked like a mummy had already surpassed Thales'!

It emitted a roar and hopped, pouncing on Thales' back, causing him to fall!

Bang!

Thales rolled on the ground with the mummy before landing on his back.

The experiences he gained during the past two (seriously unfortunate) extraordinary

days seemed to have come into effect. Thales instinctively pulled out JC's dagger with a reverse grip and stabbed the mummy with trembling hands!

He ruthlessly stabbed the mummy right in the heart... if it even has one!

However, Thales discovered, to his terror, that even though the dagger had stabbed right through the mummy, it was still lying unaffected on his body. It opened its large, black, and terrifying mouth towards his throat while revealing blackened, jagged teeth!

'Could it be that I'm too scared and my hands are trembling too much, that's why I didn't manage to stab its heart?' Thales thought in trepidation as he felt the weight pressing on his body. 'That's strange, it's not heavy?'

But he did not have time to regret his decision.

Rip!

As the dull sound of something being ripped apart rang in the air, Thales despaired as the mummy bit through the skin on his neck.

Intense pain wracked his body. Thales opened his mouth in agony, but being as exhausted as he was, he could only emit hoarse cries.

Due to the pressure on his body, all the blood in Thales' body gushed towards the artery that had been torn through.

'It's over.' Thales thought in despair.

"If a person kills, then he must also be prepared to be killed."

He remembered these words, then remembered Quide, who had died unwillingly as he clutched onto his neck.

Thales laughed bitterly in his heart.

'Karma is a b*tch.'

Yet strangely, the blood that should originally be gushing out everywhere from his wound was...

...flowing into the mummy's mouth silently and in an orderly manner?

Thales, whose throat was still in between the mummy's teeth, found, to his shock and terror when he saw from the corners of his eyes, that the mummy's body acted like a water pipe that had uneven amounts of water charging through its tunnels. Its 'mouth' to its throat, chest, abdomen, torso, and other parts of its body were swelling up, contracting, and squirming continuously.

It was like a thirsty traveler that drank madly from a spring, and the water tasted like rain that fell after a long drought.

That mummy seemed to be... sucking his blood?

Within a few seconds, as he lost more blood, Thales' physical consciousness began to fade away, but the consciousness in his soul became more alert!

It became so alert that everything in his mind appeared once again before his eyes like a movie!

"Wu Qiren, what would happen if people like you who are afraid of ghosts really ran into ghosts?"

"Could you please not talk about that? We just finished watching 'The Grudge' two nights ago. I still don't dare walk up the stairs at night alone, okay?!"

"Don't be scared! If you really ran into a ghost, bite it! Bite its throat! If it doesn't have a neck or a head..."

"Are you insane?! Stop it! Stop!!!"

"When you're feeling tired from writing your thesis and you lift up your head to stretch your neck, suddenly—"

Wu Qiren took a step forward in anger born from embarrassment, then used the method he was most accustomed with to seal that person's mouth.

Then, as he tasted the sweet taste of her mouth, he saw her eyes, filled with laughter.

The eyelashes were very long, and her eyes were bright.

'Really... What a sly and crafty girl...' Wu Qiren closed his eyes, frustrated, and continued tasting his prize.

Or perhaps should he say that he was actually offering tribute to the true victor?

Another memory returned and was included with all Thales' other memories. However, this memory seemed to differ from the rest. Once it returned to his mind, it did not fall asleep like the others of its kind. Instead, it expanded instantly and grew in size before it trembled in his mind, causing Thales, who had been immersed in the memories from his past life, to be forced out of this illusory consciousness!

Thales' eyes flew open!

During that instant, he seemed to have suddenly gained strength.

That mummy was still sucking his blood without a care for anything else as if it would not stop until it drained him completely dry.

And it continued sucking until a seven-year-old boy's hands seized the spot connecting its shoulders and neck firmly and forcefully!

"If you really ran into a ghost..."

Thales gritted his teeth, seized the mummy's body, and with his remaining strength, he lifted his head desperately...

"Bite it!"

He opened his mouth, revealing his small, baby teeth.

"...Bite its throat!"

Then, like a creature without intelligence...

...he bit down on the mummy's throat fiercely!

They looked like a pair of lovers that were necking each other.

Time seemed to have frozen until a loud crack resounded in the air out of nowhere!

The burnt, dried mummy's neck was not as tough as he imagined it to be, and a piece of flesh crumbled as Thales bit down on its neck!

That piece mystery meat was chewed on indignantly by Thales before he swallowed it!

A sentence that did not suit the atmosphere suddenly flashed in Thales' mind.

'Tastes like chicken. Crispy, too.'

Then, he continued to passionately and frantically bite down on the mummy's 'wound' in large bites.

Just like the vampires in the Cullen Family.

A foul and salty liquid suddenly gushed into Thales' mouth.

This crimson liquid flowed into his throat as he sucked it in large mouthfuls desperately.

It was like how his blood was flowing into the mummy's body swiftly as if there was a pump installed. Similarly, the foul and salty liquid from the mummy's body was being rapidly sucked into his mouth!

However, the mummy did not seem to possess any intelligence, and neither did it feel anything, just like how Thales had descended into a state of madness and how his mind had gone blank.

However, just a few seconds later...

He shuddered together with the burnt, dried, and rotting mummy!

"Ah—"

Immediately afterward, while drinking his blood, the mummy seemed to shiver and it loosened its bite around Thales' neck. It let out a piercing roar and swiftly pushed Thales away!

Once Thales was shoved away, he became stunned for two seconds, as he was overwhelmed by a feeling of relief that he had just survived through a disaster before

he instantly lifted his hand and touched the wound on the artery of his neck!

Strangely, even though blood should be spilling all over the place from his neck, not a single drop of blood was dripping out. There were only two warm puncture marks that gave off a numbing sting where his wound should be, and they felt sticky.

The mummy seemed to have rediscovered the thing called 'fear' in that dark room.

Once it pushed Thales away, it covered the spot on its neck where it had also been bitten. Thales' dagger was still in its chest, and it limped towards the black coffin where it had crawled out from!

Thales did not fall into a daze. He stood up, shivering, and found that his physical strength which had almost been depleted just now had recovered slightly.

It was just that the taste in his mouth—'Ack, ew... it's a little disgusting. Hang on. What's going on with that mummy?'

There might be a countless number of questions rising in his head, but he still pounced without any hesitation on the mummy that was fleeing in its pathetic state!

'There's no way you'll always be lucky. Now, we have a score to settle.'

As Thales let out an enraged roar, he extended his hands and pulled the mummy down.

The mummy did not stop moving as it fell and rolled on the ground. As Thales was just about to 'get to know' it with his teeth again, it jumped up in a shocking manner, reaching an exaggerated height, seized the edge of the black coffin, and, with an unsightly posture, flipped back into the coffin.

As for Thales, who had seized one of its legs, he plunged into the gigantic black stone coffin along with it.

Thump!

It was as if Thales had fallen into a puddle of water. A warm and wet liquid submerged his entire body.

'This taste...? It's foul and salty. It's blood?'

Thales wrapped his arms tightly around the struggling and squirming mummy from its back.

Before he completely lost consciousness—because he was drowning in blood—a smile appeared on Thales' lips as he was submerged in blood.

'Thank goodness.' He thought with his muddled mind, 'Thank goodness this guy still has a neck, and its head... is still intact.'

Sometime later, Thales woke up in the mysteriously dry, black coffin. He had no idea how much time had passed.

When he opened his eyes, Thales dragged himself up into a seated position. The first thing he did after that was to cough violently and cough up all the blood and water in his body.

"Cough, cough- Cough, cough-"

Thales licked a foreign object in his mouth and instantly registered what it was. As a wave of nausea rose in him, he spat it out.

He panted again and took about a few dozen seconds to recover.

Right at the next moment, Thales's right hand touched the spot by his side and he sensed something cold from a dried-up thing.

'The mummy?'

Thales continued touching it until he was certain that the mummy that had chased him around and had forced him to flee like a bird to the mountains had shattered into a good dozen something pieces, and had scattered everywhere in the gigantic coffin.

He exhaled a breath and chased away the disgusting taste in his mouth.

It was dark in the black coffin.

Thales continued groping his way about in the cold coffin. Once he touched something that felt like a step, he stood on tiptoes and climbed out of the black coffin—that was as tall as an average man's height—with great difficulty.

'This thing isn't like a coffin but more like... a children's pool?' As Thales thought about this, he came to understand how that small mummy had been able to climb out of such a tall coffin.

By using both his hands and feet, he finally climbed out of the black coffin and crashed onto the ground with a thud.

The familiar sounds of battle traveled to his ears. The sounds of a woman rebuking someone and the Count's shouts as he yelled his commands did not go unnoticed either.

Thales' face was down on the ground. As he massaged his shoulder, which was aching due to the fall, he painstakingly pushed up his upper body. 'I wonder what is the situation of the battle outside.'

Only then did Thales lift his head.

And he was then stunned.

Right before his eyes stood a single person.

It was a small person.

More accurately speaking, it was a small figure with long, silver hair falling down her shoulders. She looked a pitiable sight as she stood under the moonlight, and she was trotting forward with unstable footsteps.

With great effort, she took one step.

With great strength, she took another step.

With each step the small figure took, she would stop, and swayed as she walked towards Thales, who had just crawled out of the black coffin.

She continued walking until, with much difficulty, she stood before him.

She had red irises, a pale face, tender skin, delicate limbs, and an adorable face that still had some baby fat on it.

However, at that moment, this 'small person' was staring at Thales on the ground

coldly and even arrogantly while looking down on him.

Thales remained stunned for a time and also pondered for a long while before he struggled to his feet with a lot of questions floating in his mind.

Then, he saw the girl's entire body clearly.

She still did not say a single word, only continued looking at him with a cold and stern gaze.

After a long while...

Thales seemed to have come to a sudden realization of something. The abnormal seven-year-old boy blushed, a sight that was rarely found on him, and he scratched his head before he let out an awkward laugh.

"Little- Little girl."

He lowered his voice with slight embarrassment, and while faltering over his words, he hesitantly asked in a weak voice, "Um... Why aren't you, you know...

"...wearing clothes?"

The little girl who was not wearing clothes was standing all by her lonesome on the ground, and she was a full head shorter than this frail, seven-year-old boy.

She regarded the boy with hostility.

When Thales received no answer, he felt even more awkward.

Thankfully, this awkward atmosphere only lasted for several seconds. Because Thales suddenly realized a spot in the 'little girl's' chest.

There was a dagger stuck in there.

The blood on the dagger had yet to dry up.

There were two letters carved on the blade.

JC.

Thales' hand that was scratching his head froze up in an instant.

The boy no fool. Besides, even the retarded antagonists in those simplistic novels who had plot armor protecting them would have their IQ rising at this point.

Of course he would remember how he had stabbed the mummy's heart with the dagger just now.

However, the naked 'little girl', who did not seem to think that being naked was abnormal, was staring at him coldly.

She did not speak. The expression on her round face was calm. Thales' figure was reflected upside-down on her blood-red irises.

Thales put his hand down gently and regulated his breathing. His eyes were trained on the adorable but strange little girl in front of him, and as he looked at her, his mind began switching her figure back and forth with the terrifying phantom/mummy in his memories.

'This is seriously... abnormal.'

Thales exhaled deeply.

The naked red-eyed (mummy) girl was still staring at him with the gaze of a statue.

Anyone else in his place would begin to feel their skin crawl once they were stared at in such a bizarre fashion by this thing for such a long time.

Thales forcefully gulped, then put on a relaxed look and smiled. Once he mulled over it, he forcefully bit back on asking her which sunscreen brand she used.

'This is not a good time to test her. She might look cute, but if she's the mummy from just now, then most probably, she won't have any intelligence-'

"Who are you?"

A young voice rose into the air before him.

'Yup, even though the little girl's gaze still hasn't changed, but the words she said are quite clear, understandable, and rational.

'Compared to the mummy's roars that sounded as if it was coming back to life, her voice is so sweet, cute, and-

'Hold it!'

Thales widened his eyes in shock and scrutinized the extremely strange girl with silver hair and red irises.

'She can speak. She possessed intelligence. She's not wearing clothes- Ack, no!

'She can communicate!'

Then, Thales' mind—which seemed to have disappeared from his life for ages due to his shock—started working smoothly in that familiar manner he was accustomed to.

Translator's Notes:

1. Kayako: From The Grudge.

Chapter 32

Friendly Fire!

A long time ago, Eastern City District was just the suburbs of Eternal Star City's northeast region. That was the time before Prince Tormund brought the survivors from the Final Empire and pointed at the stars above his head as he swore to build Constellation where Eternal Star City was located.

As Constellation's power rose and its territory expanded, the structure of authority for the upper class in the kingdom began to grow. The number of feudal lords, nobles, and officials increased. The important people in the capital were unwilling to live in the same area as the vulgar merchants, the commoners, the filthy prostitutes, the thieves, and the hoodlums. That was why they built their homes in the suburbs in the northwest region.

Gradually, this area became the spot where the nobles built their manors. It was soon included under Eternal Star City's rule by the Town Hall and became the most important area in the city, aside from the central region and Morning Star Region. The feudal lords who defend the entire country, the popular and influential people in the court, and even the foreign dignitaries who were exiled from their homeland, all loved to build their mansions and manors in this place.

This place was filled with properties belonging to large and small nobles as well as officials. There were practically no apartments for commoners or any sort of bazaars. Even the people who walked on the streets were mostly the servants and subordinates who belonged to each clan. Besides the stupidly exorbitant land prices, there was also an unspoken rule in Eastern City District: The people who buy a piece of land here must have an equally matching status as the land they chose. No one should want to know the consequences of the people who violated this rule. Even the six Great Clans and the thirteen Distinguished Families had built their own estates in Eastern City District, despite having their own manors in other parts of the capital. Naturally, they were all located in the best parts of the region... no matter whether the nobles in these families came to these manors often or not.

It was precisely because of this that the manors and mansions were located far apart

from each other, and this was only possible because the area in Eastern City District was already enormous, to begin with. The grass and trees between the manors had been kept in stellar condition by the Town Hall, which was why they were all lush and strong. The main street had also been built wide. It was a stable road, and there were large Everlasting Lamps—provided by the Town Hall—placed one in every twenty meters on that street.

The police and city defense team that patrolled this street would have to be cautious. If they offended these big-shots, not even their superiors would be able to bear the consequences. Yet at the same time, their jobs were also very relaxing. Usually, when they ran into a matter that required the police and city defense team to intervene, the nobles would have their own ways of solving the matter most of the time; outsiders did not need to trouble themselves with it.

Genard had practically never used the sword and bow on his person during his ten years as the leader of the city defense team that patrolled the main street in Eastern City District all year long. His helmet and armor shone as if new. When he ran into the noble's carriages on the street, he would, on habit, straighten his armor, then take a step back and take off his helmet to salute these people. (In the words of the director of the police department in the Eastern City District, the city defense team should have changed their heavy helmets into hats. Taking off their helmets as a salute was simply too hilarious.)

Genard valued his job very much. He knew that his comrades had spent a great deal of effort and transferred him to the capital's city defense team when he was originally supposed to look for his own means of survival after the army was disbanded. Besides, he had even transferred to the Eastern City District, the safe and quiet Eastern City District where the residents there would even occasionally give him tips.

As a farmer born in Doron County, which was located to the south of Constellation, Genard's exciting experiences would definitely be worthy of a bardic song.

About a decade ago, when he was around nineteen-years-old—Genard never bothered remembering his own birthday after his father died—a disaster fell upon his entire village. Bandits who had gathered together had invaded their village and robbed them. Genard, who had no means to survive, responded to the call from a duke in the south and enlisted himself in Duke John's Starlight Brigade.

Genard, who fought valiantly and had a bright head over his shoulders, had gone

through the perilous battle to defend Jade City and fortunately managed to survive.

He once took the risk of carrying two sacks of flour and managed to catch up to the brigade who had been retreating into Walla Passage. He followed the duke valiantly and charged into the barricades around the Land of Ivory. ("Before we unite with the other troops, we owe you money for the two sacks of flour."—Duke John)

Under the orders of his superiors, he had also charged into Count Dilbert's welcoming banquet, which was held in the count's house, and had watched Duke John, who had been a guest, deal with their private army without so much as batting an eyelid.

He had even rushed out from under the wave of the impact caused by Mystic spears in Spark Prairie and crushed a battle ax.

He had also led a small troop of soldiers under the duke's nine-pointed star banner and fended against their last, desperate charge at Blade's Gap.

made a final charge when the blades of the rebel army were pointed at their throats—and managed to turn the tables and won.

On the day of his final battle—the Battle of Zodra—Genard let out a deep sigh and cursed the day where victory and sadness existed together. He waved at his team members and had them clear a path for the knights under the Iris Flower Flag

There were thirty-four knights under the Covendier Family. No carriages were moving with them, so they should only be subordinates who were running some errand for their master.

The two men leading the team seemed to possess abilities above supra class. As for the others, based on their movements and the spots they placed their weapons, they were just there for show. Genard discreetly pursed his lips and retreated to one side of the street.

Within just a short year and a few months, he had been promoted from a Transport Corps Officer to a recruit, then to an axeman, an infantry unit leader, and finally, the most honorable title of them all—the Duke's Personal Guard. Genard had transformed from a farmer who did not even know how to hold a sword, to a splendid commander who had fought in many battles. His rare experiences in battle had also made him a rare sight within those in the ordinary class. As long as he had three to five companions setting up a formation with him, then even if they ran into supra class

warriors, Genard would be a great fighter who would not retreat. Even after the Starlight Brigade was disbanded, Genard still remembered the teachings from the respected leader of the Duke's Personal Guards, and he never once missed his training.

He had once seen many knights during those days which he dubbed as the most dangerous days in his life. Some of these warriors, who were famous for their charging power on horseback, were heroic, skilled, and brave men. But there were also those who were cowardly, useless good-for-nothings who only knew how to bully the weak and cower before the strong. Of course, those in the former numbered far more than the latter when he was still in the brigade under Duke John's command

That was why Genard could tell with just one glance that the two knights in the lead were elites who had some experience in battle before, based on their smooth movements despite the calm expression on their faces, their slightly bent backs that would allow them to gain leverage while they were on horseback at any moment, and how the swords on their waists and saddles were close to their dominant hands. These elites who were above supra class were definitely high-ranked officers in an offense unit, be it vanguards, assault teams, defense teams, reserve squads, or even personal guards for commanders. These people were the essential backbones and cores of an army, like the famous Baron Arracca Murkh in the kingdom.

Right then, these two, leading twenty-something knights, should have passed them by, but one of the two elites tugged on his reins to make his horse stop before he rode towards Genard.

"City defense team!" This was a balding knight in his thirties. His green, patterned, light armor was clearly a beautifully handcrafted piece of treasure that was a family heirloom. He had a stoic look on his face as he looked down on Genard from his horse and demanded from the leader of the city defense team. "We saw horse hoofprints from a large group on the way. During this hour, there should not be this many cavaliers appearing in Eastern City District. Have you seen them?"

'And you should be here?' Genard looked at the noble knights under the Tricolor Iris Flower and whispered in his heart with derision.

However, after working in the city defense team for ten years, his temper was already gone. The former personal guard of Duke John bowed his head respectfully and submissively before he answered, "My esteemed lord, only feudal lords are able to dispatch large batches of private soldiers in Eastern City District. We do not dare pry

into their matters."

Seychelles, who was Duke Zayen's trusted knight, frowned. "Did you run into these cavaliers? Which clan do they belong to? What flag did they ride under?"

Genard fell into momentary silence.

Around ten minutes ago, the thirty-two knights that had passed this place by, were composed of those from ordinary class up to supra class. The leader was a noble and moved dexterously, but was clearly not a soldier. There was even a woman trailing behind him, but Genard did not see any flags over them.

However, how could he not recognize the soldiers' movements, equipment, and their shield models after he had served so many years under Duke John's banner? When he had been in the duke's team of personal guards, there was quite a large number of private soldiers the duke had brought out of his own clan to go with him to the south as his personal guards.

Some of those people had saved his life before, and he had also saved them. They were almost all good men—oh, and a woman—who he could entrust his back to, and all of them did not put their title as warriors under the nine-pointed star flag to shame.

'That's right.' Genard told himself once again, 'Those thirty-something cavaliers are members of the Jadestar Family, and the private soldiers of the royal family.'

More importantly, they were members of Duke John's family, whom Genard had sworn to serve until the end of his life.

"Indeed, my esteemed lord," Genard answered firmly, "we ran into them just now. They did not put up any flag, and neither do I know where they have gone to."

Duke John's former personal guard bowed. Such irony. When he was serving under Duke John, who had been the king's younger brother, no one had taught him how to bow to a noble. Yet on the second day he arrived in the capital, a low-ranking officer from the Town Hall had taught him the standard way to bow while seething with anger. ("They are nobles, understand?"—Genard's former superior in the city defense team.)

However, this ordinary city defense team captain might not know just how great of an effect he would bring to Constellation's future by keeping the information to himself.

Seychelles frowned, then reached into his gold pouch and grabbed a handful of coins. Once he threw a silver coin, and another gold coin which he grabbed accidentally, back into the pouch, he scattered the remaining copper coins to the soldiers in the city defense team.

"Your tip," he said, then made his horse turn around and gallop forward so that he could catch up to his companions.

"Don't think too much into it, and don't bother about the clans as well. We just have to do what the duke asked us to do. With the both of us here, as long as it isn't about infiltrating Renaissance Palace, there isn't anything in the capital that we can't solve. If the vampires don't work with us, they will only end up dead." Seychelles returned to the head of the ground and listened to the calm Cassain speak softly by his side.

"If they are from the other clans, then why didn't they put up their flags? A cavalier unit of about thirty to forty people with unknown identities charged into Eastern City District late at night... How long has it been since this sort of thing happened?" Seychelles said with a cautious tone. He had journeyed to the chaotic battlefield in Mane et Nox Regnum and had learned how to be cautious as well as meticulous from the sagely citizens to the east.

"His Majesty's forty-eighth birthday is around the corner. This birthday is too crucial. All the messengers from the nobles around the country, the ambassadors from the suzerains' territories, as well as the forces of power that lurk in the dark corners of the country, be they big or small, will gather in the capital. You can even say that all the eyes from the entire world will be gathered here.

"The great clans in the country are also taking action on many fronts. Their plans may be in plain sight or in the dark, and this is completely normal. Are we not doing the same thing? We're even working hard towards it." Cassain turned his head around and stated flatly, "If you're really that worried, then once you have finished your task, go back and make a report. This has nothing to do with our mission."

"Let us hope it is..." Seychelles touched the sword by his waist. When he remembered the city defense team leader with the sharp gaze just now, he said absent-mindedly, "Let's hope it isn't something by the other clans."

"Do not worry, Lord Seychelles," Cassain said languidly. "At this point in time, besides the forces of power that serve the royal family, all actions taken that support the

nineteen noble families will be seen as acts of betrayal.

"And how could a traitor of the nobles succeed in the 'king selection'?"

.....

A brilliant light shone in Jines' eyes as she avoided the two blood slaves that had charged towards her in a crazed dash. With a flick of her wrist, the silver chainsword in her hand jerked upwards and bound them together. The other two Jadestar Family Swordsmen of Eradication moved forwards in a show of great teamwork and plunged the silver swords in their hands straight into the two blood slaves' hearts.

However, the female official seemed to have sensed something during that instant. She crouched down and rolled to the side, avoiding the sharp claw that had suddenly appeared.

When the Blood Clanswoman, Rolana, saw that she was unable to hit Jines with one single move, she turned around swiftly and warded off two silver swords. Then, with one piercing scream, she retreated swiftly. Hissing sounds followed in her wake.

'I'm still not used to using this new right arm. It's limiting my actual abilities,' thought Rolana in anger. 'That damned, thrice cursed, half-crippled Psionic.'

"Hey, you bloodsucking whore! Next time, be more accurate! I've seen plenty of you vampires committing crimes in the city! I've even personally captured a Blood Clan Count from Olas Family before!" Jines sat up fiercely. She swung her long, slender arms and the chainsword instantly bound itself around Rolana's left leg.

Then, she wrapped the chainsword around her own right arm, and a bizarre, powerful strength surged from her arm as she yanked the chain ruthlessly!

Rolana, who had just avoided a sword flash, staggered before she fell to the ground! She screamed as she was continuously dragged across the floor.

'This female mortal's strength... Is she a monster?'

Rolana roared and seized the ground to resist Jines' monstrous strength, but before she could gain her footing, another silver sword tried to stab her.

'This damned sword formation!' Rolana cursed in her heart. She absolutely could not

make full use of her superhuman speed and unique abilities when she faced this sort of enemy.

The Starlight Formation was a circular, defensive formation. The main parts of the formation were the small teams formed by a handful of people jutting out from the edges. They were the antennas and the explorers of the entire formation. They also allowed the entire formation to agilely press forward and retreat during a scuffle.

Rolana carefully avoided the silver swords while resisting Jines' monstrous strength and kicking away the swordsmen that were ambushing her. The blood slaves were dwindling in numbers as they were trapped in the sword formation's encirclement. After all, how could monsters without intelligence hope to fight against swordsmen who had fought in hundreds of battles?

"Gilbert!" As Jines let out an enraged shout, she tightened her grip on the chain in her hands. "Where is the child? We've been held back by these two and a bunch of lunatics for so long, you better have a justifiable plan!"

On the other side of the formation was the entrance to the house. Over there was Gilbert, with one hand wielding a sword and the other a staff. He was working together with a few Swordsmen of Eradication and attacking the blond Istrone after surrounding him.

"Yodel is held back by the other person. That man is also in supreme class!" Gilbert said with a frown. "But since we're all held back here, we can only trust him!"

"You... are all a bunch of incompetent men!"

Gilbert did not bother himself with Jines' verbal abuse. He turned his attention back to Istrone. It was precisely this clansman who had kidnapped Thales from under the eight guards' noses with his extraordinary speed and had even taken away the guards' lives.

Istrone's unique, inborn talent was that he had the speed that surpassed the average member of a Blood Clan. Even though he was still in supra class, his speed had already surpassed most of his peers of the same level. However, just tonight alone, he had already met two mortal enemies who were both also in supra class, and both were completely unafraid of his extraordinary speed.

One of them was Blood Bottle Gang's Nikolay. Istrone had seen that person's first few

moves clearly. Nikolay had completely been unable to catch up to Istrone's speed, but for some unknown reason, after they exchanged a few blows, Nikolay's speed and reflexes became increasingly faster, and during the most crucial moment of the battle, Nikolay's punching speed and bodily reflexes were equal to Istrone's. If Chris had not suddenly intervened, Istrone had a feeling that Nikolay's speed would surpass his in the end!

The second one made Istrone's skin crawl, and he was the elegant and dignified middle-aged man standing before him, who made fear rise in Istrone's heart! Gilbert was the same as Nikolay. He, too, could not catch up to Istrone's speed, but this noble had used his own method to suppress the high speed which Istrone prided himself with.

The silver sword in Gilbert's right hand was very stable. His footsteps were filled with the elegance possessed by nobles as they fought, but what Istrone was worried about was not his sword. The blond Blood Clansman could easily handle the speed of the sword, and could even flip over two swordsmen as he dodged it.

What he was worried about was the staff in Gilbert's left hand!

Compared to the orthodox sword style he used, the staff looked as if it was wielded by someone else! Every single time Istrone dodged or blocked a silver sword and was just about to counterattack, that strange staff would strike him out of nowhere, and it would always hit him in the direction where he was just about to counter without ever missing, or it would hit the crucial joint which he used to gain leverage. He would force Istrone to back down while he nursed grievances in his heart. Then, he would be surrounded by the other swordsmen and be attacked again.

It was precisely because of that strange staff that Istrone even had a feeling that he was not holding back Gilbert, but Gilbert was the one holding him back!

However, Istrone did not know that he had fallen into Gilbert's trap since the beginning. The key to the martial arts in Gilbert's family, which had been handed down generation to generation, did not lie in the staff, but by the sword in his right hand that moved in an orthodox, ordinary manner!

"Sir Chris." Istrone's ears twitched. He had heard Rolana's low mummers during the scuffle.

"It's very difficult for us to continue holding on. Has Her Highness not woken up yet? If we can't make it here, then let's take the ancestral coffin and retreat."

They did not know that Chris, who was holding onto Yodel's short sword in a tight grip, had a face full of shock and disbelief at that moment.

This emotion had even affected his opponent, Yodel, who was right before him, his face hidden behind the mask.

Chris murmured a few words under his breath. Only Yodel and the members of the Blood Clan with superhuman hearing could hear them.

The two supreme class elites stopped fighting and let go of each other before they pulled back in different directions.

Rolana and Istrone heard Chris' murmurs, and their jaws fell slack simultaneously. However, they immediately retreated swiftly, only dodging, never retaliating.

Soon, the people who were engaged in a scuffle on the lawns discovered to their shock that the blood slaves had also retreated to one side as they hissed and roared. Even if they had their heads cut off by the swordsmen beside them, they still did not care.

Jines looked at Gilbert in shock from her place inside the sword formation. The latter was frowning as he thought about the situation before his eyes.

They were not puzzled for long.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The sound of footsteps belonging to children traveled swiftly from within the house.

Along with those footsteps came a young boy's voice.

"Everyone!"

All the people on the lawns saw the same thing. They saw a half-naked Thales, dragging a girl with silver hair dressed in his shirt behind him while panting harshly. They ran out of the door to the ground floor and arrived at the lawn in the manor.

Before he could see the situation before him clearly, Thales used all his strength as a

seven-year-old and all the methods of conveyance he already knew to shout at the sky with his muddled mind.

"Stop! We're allies! Friendly fire! Knock it off!"

Right at the moment he finished shouting, the silver-haired girl who had not been able to stop herself in time, since she had been rushing behind Thales, knocked into the boy's back and crashed onto the ground with him.

Chapter 33

Long Reign the Blood

The moonlight shone on the lawn of Vine Manor. Everyone stared in shock at the two children lying on the ground. For a while, there was only silence.

Thales lied on the floor, breathing heavily. His half-naked body was covered with nothing other than the bandage over his wound. The only thing he could feel was the cold and pain.

On the other hand, the silver-haired loli on his bosom propped up her body by pressing on his shoulder without any expressions on her face. She saw the bandage on his chest, which covered the silver coin-sized burn wound. She smelled the scent of blood on it and revealed an expression of anticipation and mesmerization.

This expression frightened Thales and he immediately sat up, before the dangerous Blood Clan girl (Thales had long since thought of her as a boss monster who would become a blood-sucking mummy at any time) could reveal her fangs, he pushed her off his bosom.

Yodel and Chris immediately appeared in front of the two children.

"I'm okay, Yodel, don't worry." Thales saw the wound on the secret protector's chest and flashed a tired smile. The latter took off the cape around his leotard and put it over Thales.

Thales nodded. "Before this, there is something urgent that must be dealt with."

He turned to face another direction. There was a large pit with a legless and half-dead person lying inside.

The Phantom Wind Follower, Midira Ralf. The person who struggled and broke free of his shackles. A survivor who did not want to escape pain through death.

"Sir Gilbert, please be sure to save that person." Speaking to Gilbert, who was some distance away, Thales' gaze became dim but determined. "If it weren't for him, I

probably wouldn't have been able to last until all of you arrived."

'And also,' Thales muttered inwardly, 'he is the first person I have truly saved in this damned world.'

Gilbert nodded and commanded the Swordsman of Eradication beside him to rescue Ralf.

"Your Highness!" Chris' still face was full of excitement. He kneeled in front of the silver-haired loli on one knee. Trembling, he put the woolen blanket in his hands over her body.

Thales shirt was not big enough and was torn in many places, it only covered the little girl up to her knees. Her two fair calves were exposed. Having thought of this, Chris glared fiercely at Thales.

Her Highness was of noble status and she completely paid no heed to these ants' stares, but as the loyal butler of the Corleone family for more than six hundred years, Chris naturally had to take everything into account on behalf of his mistress.

"Your Highness, you are finally awake!"

The adorable, red-eyed, little girl nodded without any emotion on her face. She habitually held on to Chris' extended hand and spoke word by word in a tone exclusive to those in power. "Chwis, all of you did well."

Her face, which still had some baby fat, and looked like a steamed bun, was kept straight and unsmiling as she babbled with a childish, adorable, and unclear voice. "Woyalty will definitewy be wewardred."

Thales, who was beside her, took two seconds to understand the sentence, 'Loyalty will definitely be rewarded.'

And then he laughed out loud.

It was truly an appalling sight for a lisping, young, little loli to speak such solemn words. Chris, who was nodding in gratitude beside him, shot him an angry glare.

"You are... Your Highness?" Rolana and Istrone appeared in front of the little loli with surprised and bewildered expressions. The former looked at her short stature and

asked carefully, "Why did your appearance become like this?"

The little loli raised her crimson pupils and looked at Thales with a complicated expression. She then spoke nonchalantly, "As wong as I wecover my stwength, I will go back to my former appeawance."

Upon speaking, the little loli looked at Thales, who was holding back his laughter. She did not look like she was aware of her pronunciation problems. And so, with an ice-cold expression, she asked, slightly puzzled, "What is so fwunny?"

Thales could no longer hold it back and laughed out loud.

At this, the three Blood Clansmen looked at him with hostile gazes. Istrone's eyes were even tinged with a layer of caution and reverence as he watched Thales.

"Nothing, haha... cough, cough." Thales immediately masked his laughter with unprofessional coughing sounds. "There's nothing fwunny... haha... cough, cough... I'm sorry."

Gilbert and Jines, who had rounded up the Swordsmen of Eradication, walked up to them at the same time. Holding his staff, the former respectfully took off his hat as a salute and said, "My esteemed Sir Thales, and this adorable Blood Clanswoman, would you mind explaining the situation to us?"

Thales put away his amused expression and looked at Gilbert with gratitude, "Sir Gilbert, I thank all of you for rescuing me, and for your sacrifice."

However, he suddenly felt that the charming forty-something-year-old lady behind Gilbert was looking at him with a complicated expression. The look in her eyes was profound and indecipherable.

'Is this the boy? The son he had with... that person.' Jines' gaze darkened immediately.

Thales did not think too much about it. He turned his head and continued speaking. "Let's postpone the self-introductions. Too much blood has been shed tonight. Therefore, along with this..." Having said this, he glanced at the little loli—who actually looked very innocent and adorable but chose to keep a straight and unsmiling face—and paused.

Looking at the red-eyed loli's hostile expression, he immediately corrected himself.

“...little girl... erm, Lady... Serena Corleone... After a friendly and pleasant discussion...”

The little loli, Serena, suddenly felt her neck itching slightly. She pouted in a way so that no one would notice she had done just that.

"We have decided to let go of our hatred, end our hostility, and establish an alliance. I will provide Lady Serena periodically with my blood, whereas Lady Serena and her subordinates will serve me until..."

Before Thales could finish his sentence, he felt Yodel's hand, which was holding him, tighten abruptly. His sentence was then cut off anxiously by two others.

"Why should we serve you? We can provide you with other benefits in exchange. If worse comes to worst, we can just walk away," Rolana, the red-haired Blood Clanswoman said with a hostile countenance.

"Sir Thales! Your blood? This is too dangerous, how can this..." This was said by Gilbert, who was anxious to protect his master.

However, Thales only abruptly raised his right hand and then clenched his fist tightly.

This was a gesture he often made in his past life while leading tutorial classes of undergraduate students, to calm down discussions that were getting more and more heated and irrelevant.

The two of them stopped speaking at the same time. The boy sucked in a deep breath.

Thales left Yodel, who had been supporting him by the arm, and slowly walked towards the Blood Clansmen—despite Gilbert trying to stop him. He spoke softly, "You may serve me in exchange for my protection.

"As for myself, for you people—a group of homeless political refugees who can only deceive their way around for food and drink by relying on the Corleone banner and the Iris Flower stamp—I will provide you asylum in Constellation. It is a protection better than what this manor's owner can offer.

Chris, Istrone, and Rolana's expression changed at the same time. They looked at Serena. However, the silver-haired loli with red eyes only snorted coldly. "I did not tell him anything. He guessed it by himself."

'Guessed? Being on bad terms with Blood Bottle Gang, not being of one mind with the manor's owner, Istrone saying "with our situation right now", and the coffin on the second floor that looks like a swimming pool but is actually a large sickroom.' The boy thought quietly in his heart, 'Summing up all these elements and indications, is it not extremely obvious?'

He knew that the Blood Clansmen were extremely wary of him, but he did not mind because the problem at hand had, at least, been solved.

Thales turned his head and looked at Gilbert and Yodel earnestly. "Gilbert, Yodel, please believe in me. I will provide blood under a situation that does not harm my health to aid Lady Serena's, wecovewy... cough, cough... recovery. I made this promise in exchange for my safety just now, along with Her Highness' friendship."

Gilbert stared at Thales for a long time.

However, Jines, who was behind Gilbert, took a step forward with a complicated expression and said softly, "Gilbert, this is a promise he made, and also a promise his family made."

'Just like what he did years ago,' she added quietly in her heart.

Gilbert sighed deeply and nodded at Thales. "Of course, we believe in you. However, I will report this to..."

Thales smiled lightly. He turned around so that all the Blood Clansmen were within his sight, then said softly, "Then allow me to make a formal introduction..."

However, before he could finish his sentence, Chris, who was beside him, took a solemn step forward and spoke with a serious tone.

"Please, do not trouble yourself. Standing before you..." He softly supported the little loli by the arm as the latter walked forward unsteadily and continued, "Is the Archduchess, Lady Serena L.A. Corleone. The true heir to the Corleone family—the family that heads the Seven Great Clans in Eastern Peninsula's Night Kingdom. She is also the legal and legitimate ruler of the Hill of Pain."

Chris looked at the mortals with an arrogant gaze. Behind him, Rolana and Istrone displayed proud expressions.

With her appearance of a little loli around five or six years old, Serena lowered her round face and, holding her non-existent dress, curtsied. She then raised her head, still showing no expression on her face.

Thales pouted in his heart. 'Sure makes her sound powerful.'

Gilbert and Jines looked at one another. They could see the shock in each other's eyes.

After the earth-shattering Battle of Eradication over six hundred years ago, like many other races with a long history, the thirteen most noble clans in the Blood Clan were divided into two factions—the East and the West—in the two directions facing the Sea of Eradication.

The five clans in the Western Peninsula formed a Clan Union and the Dark Night Assembly. They occupied the Grand Banquet Hill (to be more precise, they occupied a piece of land and called it the Grand Banquet Hill). On the other hand, the eight clans in the Eastern Peninsula established a monarchy system and made their home on the Eastern bank of the Sea of Eradication with the name of 'Night Kingdom'.

Throughout these six hundred over years, compared to their relatives in the Western Peninsula's Grand Banquet Hill who were scattered, not united, and were even forced to sign the 'Treaty of Subordination between Human Countries and Immortals'; under the mighty rule of the infamously ferocious 'Night Wing King' Laurie Corleone, the Blood Clansmen in Night Kingdom became more united and powerful. They even participated extensively in the peninsula's affairs. In the second and third Peninsula War, they dispatched the 'Sacred Blood Army' which was formed by elite Blood Clan warriors to participate in the battle. In the third Peninsula War, the Night Wing King had even once personally led his army in attacking Dragon Clouds City, the capital of 'Western Peninsula's Blade', Eckstedt Kingdom.

However, two hundred years ago, there was an abrupt change to Night Kingdom's political climate. The Night Wing King mysteriously disappeared. The Eight Great Clans' foundations were badly shaken. The Hollier family even had the entire clan betray the Night Kingdom by going across the ocean and allying themselves to the Dark Night Assembly in Grand Banquet Hill.

Ever since then, Night Kingdom only had seven ruling clans left. They also lost the only elite who had hope of breaking into the 'true class'. When they were attacked by Sunrise Church, their strength slowly went into decline.

While one party fell, the other rose. For the Dark Night Assembly in Western Peninsula's Grand Banquet Hill, the Six Great Clans made great efforts to build a strong state. They reformed their rotten and outdated system and extensively developed their diplomatic skills. They even became one of the confederates for the 'Fortress Treaty' and called themselves 'The Blood Clan's Six Big Pillars'.

And the little girl in front of them was claiming to be the master of Night Kingdom's Hill of Pain—the Corleone family lair where the Night Wing King was born.

Gilbert raised his head and said respectfully, "Pardon me for being presumptuous, but based on my knowledge, the Night Queen is the master of the Corleone family right now and also happens to be the Hill of Pain's actual ruler. She is also Night Kingdom's current suzerain—"The Weeper", Her Majesty Katerina L.A. Corleone."

Gilbert deliberately emphasized the pronunciation of the titles 'Night Queen' and 'Her Majesty', highlighting its difference with Serena's 'Her Highness'.

Thales yawned, causing the already annoyed Chris to stare angrily at him again.

Serena's red pupils constricted slightly. She pouted and took a step forward. "My cwybaby wittle sister, Katerina, ilwegally seized the wight I inhewited from my father, the Night Wing King. She wusurped the Bwood Ocean Thwone. However, one day, I will wegain my thwone.

With her cheeks that were filled with baby fat tilted slightly and her little hand clenched in front of her chest, she closed her eyes and uttered Corleone family's motto, "Long reign the blood."

Istrone and Rolana's expression immediately became solemn. They humbly lowered their chest and clenched their fists at the position over their hearts. Together with Chris, they took a step back, lowered their heads, and chanted, "Long reign the blood."

'This, this, this... ' Thales felt his mind whirling over the ridiculousness of it all, 'Why don't you shout "unify all lands" as well?'

"I will definitewy weward you all for your help and suppwort." Serena opened her eyes and looked fixedly at Thales. She unconsciously licked her lips.

'Like biting my neck open?' Thales rolled his eyes and avoided the little loli's fervent gaze. He spoke perfunctorily, "Wow, this is something I wouldn't be able to obtain even

if I wished for it. I am extremely honored."

Serena puffed her little cheeks as if slightly dissatisfied with Thales' attitude.

Looking at Thales' strange demeanor, Istrone recalled that this was probably the same approach Thales had used to order him around. He got annoyed all of a sudden.

Looking at Her Highness' expression, he flashed a cold smile and said to Thales, "Little brat, you probably don't know much about the Night Kingdom, which is on the opposite bank of the ocean. Let me put it this way: Even if your enemy is Constellation's supreme king, with the support and protection of our 'Sacred Blood Army', he definitely would not dare to make things difficult for you."

Just as Istrone finished talking, Rolana, who was beside him felt that something was not right.

The countenances of the few people opposite them were very weird, especially the middle-aged noble (who had a strange expression) and the black-haired woman (who looked annoyed).

Chris furrowed his brows. However, he did not manage in time to stop the blond Blood Clansman from speaking. After all, he had dueled against them and knew that the masked person is an elite at the peak of supreme class.

Thales' face twitched a little. 'Egotism is a disease, and you should be treated for it!'

"Then, it's my turn to introduce myself." Thales scratched his head and said to the little loli, "Um, my name is Thales, and I am around seven years old this year. In the past..."

At this moment, Jines briskly walked forward with an annoyed expression, but Gilbert stopped her just as she was about to begin speaking.

The gray-haired noble heaved a sigh. "I believe that the alliance between us would not be too short, and Lady Serena also needs time to prepare to regain her throne. Therefore, we will be honest with you."

Count Gilbert Caso raised his head and with a solemn expression, said a few brief words, "This is Thales, Constellation's... next supreme king."

A long moment passed.

A very, very long moment passed.

Just as Thales felt that even the air was turning into stone, a gust of wind finally blew past.

"Hehe, um." He giggled awkwardly and waved his hand at the four petrified Blood Clansmen opposite him. "Thank you for your... Sacred Blood Army's support and protection."

Jines, who was behind him, snickered.

Chapter 34

Jines Bajkovic

"A troop of at least thirty cavaliers have broken through the main entrance. Signs of intense battle are everywhere from the lawn of the manor to the dungeon."

At Vine Manor, a knight under the Tricolor Iris Flower flag, Lord Seychelles, who wore a green striped armor, frowned while stroking the manor's iron-made main door that was warped from the impact.

The knights around him went searching for clues in the manor that has long since been empty of people for what little evidence they could find among the scattered corpses.

At that moment, they heard the thin-haired Lord Seychelles say gravely, "Both parties launched a massive battle. Up until at least half an hour ago, this Place was probably in chaos. Obviously, the Blood Clan lost the battle as all the dead bodies on the floor belong to the blood slaves. The number of dead bodies also matches the one reported by the fleet that transported them.

"Based on the wounds on the dead bodies, the other party used high-purity silver weapons. They came prepared.

"All the members of the Blood Clan's Corleone family have gone missing; either they were killed and their corpses carried away, were captured alive, or have escaped; maybe even all three. Whatever it is, we don't have to worry about the secret they harbor anymore; it has either fallen into the enemy's hands or disappeared without a trace."

However, both situations are far from good. Seychelles' heart sank and stroked his sparse hair with his right, iron-gloved hand.

Another voice came from behind him. "The only good news is that the duke wasn't planning to mobilize them anyway. That's why they don't know anything about our plans and movements."

The neat-looking Lord Cassain was another knight with a lordship. He stood up from

beside the corpse of a blood slave and looked at Seychelles. "This is my fault, I will apologize to the duke later." The knight's expression was horrifyingly dark, but this noble knight did not shirk his responsibility. He spoke with solemnity and with misery, "I neglected the fact that I saw a large number of cavaliers during our journey; it seems clear now that they were the ones who attacked Vine Manor. If we had advanced at full speed then, we might have been able to stop them."

However, Seychelles did not think so. His intuition told him that these cavaliers that attacked Vine Manor were extremely suspicious. Even if they were able to stop the troops, it might not necessarily have ended well.

Even though both he and Cassain were supreme class Knights of Eradication.

However, Seychelles knew that it was not the time to make his good friend even more miserable. The neglect due to his carelessness had brought about this mistake, and this had caused him to be full of self-blame.

"There are two questions that are in urgent need to be solved." Seychelles glanced at the mottled manor wall and entered the house. "First, who were those people? Second, why were they here?"

Cassain entered the hall with his best friend. Although he could already smell the overwhelming stench of blood, when he saw the gruesome scene in the hall, he could not help but turn away.

Compared to Seychelles, who was once a mercenary in the Eastern Peninsula and lived every day by the tip of a knife, Cassain's origin was much better than his compatriot's. When the old duke conferred the title of a knight to him years ago, he was a first-rate Swordsman of Eradication who had just completed his training at the Tower of Eradication and was a young, ignorant brat who had a bright future ahead of him.

Ever since he became a Knight of Eradication, Cassain had not experienced a bloodbath greater than the tournaments in a very long time.

"If we immediately dispatch a unit to conduct a thorough investigation, we might be able to find some clues about these cavaliers." Cassain looked at the body on the table in disgust—it had been drained off all its blood—and spoke with a frown, "If they are members of a certain family, then the best camouflage would be to enter the manors of various nobles in the eastern town districts."

However, his compatriot, Seychelles, shook his head. He thought of the rabbits that roamed and scrambled around the prairies in the Eastern Peninsula. No matter how many clever traps the nomads of the Sele Tribe set up, the rabbits always found a way to survive.

The rabbits' only mortal enemies were the falcons who roamed the sky and could see everything happening on the ground at once.

Seychelles followed the trail of blood and walked towards the dungeon. He opened his mouth to argue. "We are already operating in a very flashy manner, and now you want to dispatch troops to search through all manors in the eastern town districts? Yeah, sure, we might be able to get some clues about those people, but that's only after we manage to offend all the people in the upper-class society in the entire Constellation because we searched their manors. Since we can't uncover their identities, we can only identify their motives."

Cassain picked up an Everlasting Lamp and covered his mouth and nose while inwardly cursing at these insatiable vampires. As he walked along the stone steps leading to the bloody dungeon, his voice became muffled and echoed between the dark walls.

"This Place was lent to Blood Bottle Gang as a temporary encampment to receive and hide the elites of the Corleone family. However, both Nikolay and Corleone are nowhere to be seen."

"We and the Corleone family are behind the Blood Bottle Gang. This is an open secret among us. However, the aiders in the Corleone family have always been our secret contacts. That's why, if they are discovered, it is highly likely that whoever discovers them would trace their connections and discover our plan too."

"All the families who are participating in "New Star" know about the plan to an extent, so it's not something to be worried about." Lord Seychelles did not feel any difference at all as he walked through the blood-saturated air. He calmly analyzed, "I have already sent someone to report this to the duke. Blood Bottle Gang's contact will also arrive soon. However, what secret is the Corleone family harboring, to the extent of provoking these people?"

Cassain held an Everlasting Lamp and tried hard to maintain his composure. He stopped at a pile of ruins in the dungeon and sized up the place, his gaze full of

puzzlement.

It was obvious that these ruins used to be a prison cell. But right now, it was completely disfigured.

It was as though it went through terrifying destruction; the iron fences, chains and stone walls had been smashed into tiny pieces, debris scattered everywhere in the cramped prison cell.

It was as though someone had cut them into smithereens.

"The dungeon doubles as the Blood Clan's blood bank," Seychelles said coldly. "Looks like somebody didn't really like this place."

"Whether it was vampires or people from Blood Bottle Gang, or even intruders; why would they destroy the dungeon like this? To vent their frustrations?" Cassain asked, puzzled.

"The dungeon wasn't destroyed by them." Seychelles picked up small, black piece of mysterious material made of a stone that had weird patterns and words engraved on it. His face was somber. "This is a dungeon; I'm afraid that a dangerous person who was locked here had escaped. The cavaliers who barged in had probably 'cleared' this bloody manor by working together with this person. They coordinated by having one work from the inside while the other party worked from the outside."

If Thales were here, he would probably be clapping for and praising this balding knight because his guess was very close to the truth.

"This degree of destruction..." Cassain, who was frowning deeply looked at the degree of demolition in the dungeon and said in awe, "only supreme class elites are able to do it."

"No." Seychelles' gaze suddenly became extremely strange. He held the piece of mysterious, black, stone-like fragment and said, "According to this shape, I'm afraid that this piece of stone was part of a shackle. I suspect that the shackles were used to chain up that mysterious person."

The next moment, he flung the black stone into the air with his left hand. Seychelles' gaze sharpened as he drew his Cross Hand Guard Saber from his left waist.

The sharp and clear edge of the saber cut through the mysterious stone.

During that instant, all was silent.

A second later, invisible waves riding on the compression in the air swept through the narrow dungeon.

Huge, deep cracks were etched into the surrounding walls!

Behind him, Cassain nodded in admiration. This perfect swing was a balanced combination of precision, speed, and skill. The "Fortress Flower" was probably something like this.

The sound of the saber cutting through stone finally came.

Chiang!

The sound was crisp and sparks flew in all directions.

Boom!

The strong wind brought about by the swing of the saber simultaneously blew around their ears.

The momentum of Seychelles' saber brought down plenty of debris from all four walls. As the strong wind blew, swirling clouds of dust filled the dungeon.

The Everlasting Lamp in Cassain's hand was extinguished by the strong wind in the blink of an eye.

The strong gusts vanished.

Seychelles did not change his expression as he sheathed his saber.

Cassain covered his mouth and nose. Although he disliked the dust, he reignited his Everlasting Lamp and bent down to search among the debris.

As Cassain brought the mysterious black stone in front of Seychelles, both stared at each other. The two supreme class Knights of Eradication saw shock and fear in each other's eyes.

The black stone, which had been cut by a supreme class elite's saber was resting on Cassain's hand, was completely intact without a single scratch.

They were silent for a long time until Cassain spoke with difficulty.

"Looks like I was wrong again. This degree of destruction—"

Cassain turned his head, his face greenish and pale. Looking at the shattered dungeon, his face was full of disbelief.

"Even supreme class elites can't achieve this!"

.....

Eleven o'clock at night.

In a bedroom on the third floor of Mindis Hall, the mysterious person who was the topic of discussion of the two supreme class Knights in Vine Manor—Thales (who had recently escaped great calamity and wore clean, tidy clothes) sat awkwardly on the bed.

He stared absent-mindedly at the female official, who was forty-something years old but still attractive and had a beauty mole beside her mouth. She was reprimanding two other people.

'Too bad.' Thales thought, 'If only she was a little gentler.'

"Is this the kingdom's heir that you people are looking after?"

"Are you people savages?"

"What His Majesty entrusted to you is his heir! Constellation's future! Not some gray monitor lizard you can just throw on an island and expect to survive!"

"With your manners, you people probably can't even take good care of a monitor lizard!"

The stately female official was growling in a dominating manner and reprimanding His Majesty's two most trusted followers—Count Gilbert Caso, and Protector Yodel Cato. The two of them lowered their heads obediently and accepted the rebuke.

"His everyday diet consists of only bread and beef? Do you people know that he's growing up right now? Have you people actually given him a bath? Don't tell me that scrubbing with clear water counts as bathing! Can't you see that all his wounds need delicate care? Bandages? What is this? Have you people taught him the correct way of putting on clothes? Don't use the lack of time as an excuse!

"What sort of beddings are you letting him use? These blankets and pillows are practically child killers! You people have the audacity to prohibit him from going outdoors? Do you know how important sunlight is for growth?!

"Safety? Don't look for an excuse! Didn't he get kidnapped right under your eyes when he was indoors? Place the vampire girl in a room at least a hundred meters away! What? There's no such room? Then go and dig one out now!

"From tomorrow onwards, apart from when offering protection and giving lessons, you both stay at least ten meters away from him! You useless men!"

After a while, when Jines finished her angry reprimanding, she chased the two "useless men" out of Thales' room ("Go and prepare everything on the list immediately!" -Jines). Then, she suddenly turned her head around.

It terrified Thales, who was on the bed drinking a glass of water and watching the whole thing. He scooted a half-meter back.

As he looked at Jines' stern eyes, the boy was reminded of the high school class teacher in his memories.

However, Jines only looked at Thales hesitantly and with a complicated gaze. In the end, she sighed delicately, then forced a smile and tried her best to speak gently.

"Don't be scared, Thales. You are safe now and will always be safe.

"In the one month you're staying in Mindis Hall, I will be wholly responsible for your everyday life."

Thales swallowed a mouthful of water and nodded. "Thank you, err—"

Jines continued her sentence softly. "I am Jines Bajkovic, a first-grade female official. I am your father's loyal friend, follower and... Erm, how do I put this..." Having said that, Jines paused, as if contemplating something.

But in the end, she raised her brow as if she had thought of what term to use. She spoke decisively, "...and his lover."

Thales could not hold it in and spat his mouthful of water onto the bed.

.....

On a road not far away from Mindis Hall, Yodel manifested in the air and kneeled on one leg in front of a muscular figure.

"You should go inside and take a look." Yodel growled.

However, the muscular figure only remained silent.

It took a while before he spoke, "You're still the same as twelve years ago," the figure spoke slowly, "always doing ridiculous things."

Yodel knew that he was not referring to the incident in Vine Manor.

"But you sent Gilbert here." Yodel lowered his head slightly. "You are also hesitating."

The figure did not speak for a long time.

In the end, he raised his head and looked at the lights shining out of the room on the third floor. He then turned and left, flanked by a troop of elite bodyguards clad in silver armor.

Only the Mask Protector's lone form was left kneeling under the moonlight.

Chapter 35

Knights, Ordinary Class, and Supra Class

Jines did not say anything else; she tended to his new wounds and told Thales to rest. Before she left his room, she also promised that she would let his life 'return to normal' by tomorrow.

But when nighttime arrived, Thales' sleep was restless—the things he had experienced during the past few days were just too bizarre.

The terrors in Red Street Market, Mindis Hall's sensational secrets, and his strive for survival in Vine Manor, had all made him extremely exhausted after thinking too much.

Worse still, even after Thales had reached this point, he still could not get used to the soft mattress beneath him. It was as if his ability to fall asleep in his past life right when his head hit the pillow had vanished without a trace.

'Ah...' Thales rolled his eyes.

After tossing and turning a million times over, he got up from bed as usual, then went to his 'designated' corner before he curled up his body and laid down.

'As expected, hard surfaces suit me more.' Thales licked his lips.

Two days ago, he had been worried about the survival of the five child beggars in the Abandoned Houses and was plotting his grand escape.

After that, his life had been filled with drastic changes, and he was like a duckweed without roots being blown by a violent gust of wind. He struggled in this world that was filled with evil and misfortune, and he had used every method he had at his disposal for his own survival.

'I just want to live well.

'But with this status...' Thales looked at the wall above the fireplace. In the dim inner chamber, he could vaguely see the pattern of a huge star in the shape of a nonagon.

'Things such as "living well" and "being a free person",' Thales sighed deeply and thought, 'are probably wild dreams.'

Not to mention...

Thales absent-mindedly raised his right hand. Under the moonlight, he looked at the bandaged abrasion there.

'What actually was... ' Thales recalled the moment he released Ralf from the shackles and the surge of explosion and light that appeared right afterward. 'What was that energy?'

Then there was the loli vampire. When Thales recalled her mummified looks and the two, almost invisible, round holes on his neck, he felt a surge of fear.

And now, Thales was sure that his past-life memories that often flashed inside his mind without reason were not just fragments. What sort of memories were able to support him to the point where he could suddenly exude superhuman strength and determination at the most dangerous moments, anyway?

Although it had been five years since he came to this place, Thales realized in disappointment that his uncertainty and lack of understanding regarding this world did not diminish but instead gradually piled up.

.....

Someone still woke up him by screaming into his ears while he was still on his bed and covered by his blankets. When he was sleeping, someone had returned him there.

But today's atmosphere was significantly different.

First of all, it was Jines who woke him up instead. She patiently explained to the flustered Thales the steps in putting on noble clothing. Next, his breakfast had also been changed to delicious cake and milk instead of bread and beef. The guards in the hall were walking back and forth busily, carrying inside item after item that had obviously just been transported here today.

Gilbert appeared with a stern face and told Thales that his personally tailored classes would begin from nine in the morning and until nine at night.

This made Thales truly feel that his daily life had completely changed. And although it was only the first class in the morning, the content was something he had never been exposed to before.

After breakfast, Thales was led by Jines to a cleared, empty plot filled with soft sand in the backyard of Mindis hall. Gilbert Caso was holding his exquisite staff and standing among a huge array of weapon racks, dummies for sword practice, archery targets, sandbags, horse-hitching posts, and a young foal.

He spoke to him solemnly, "After the incidents that happened these past few days, having gone through deep contemplation and after making careful choices, Young Sir Thales, we believe that you are in urgent need of basic training for fighting and self-defense skills. And as a child who will be growing up alongside Lord Mahn, you should, naturally, be well-versed with horsemanship and basic swordsmanship skills. Do not worry. We, especially Lady Jines, guarantee that the training will not affect your existing wounds."

'What?'

Thales let out a deep breath, then to his surprise, he saw Jines taking a step towards him. She spoke coldly.

"Do not be surprised, child, the morning is the best time to train your body. As Constellation's future heir, you must, of course, have a body that can bear this heavy responsibility—and I will make sure of this."

Thales stared at the curvy Jines, who stood under the sun wearing the elegant attire of a female official. He looked at the empty space around him and scratched his head.

"Why isn't Yodel the one teaching me? He looks formidable." The boy recalled the secret protector who moved about the town area with swift movements.

"Do you expect a supreme class elite, who are hard to come by in the entire kingdom, to teach a newbie about the most basic things?" Gilbert, who stood nearby, put his hands behind his back and continued, "And, please believe me when I say that Yodel's tactics do not suit your status and traits."

Thales nodded his head, not fully understanding what Gilbert had just said. "What is a supreme class?"

At this, Jines clapped her hands, walked towards the middle of the field and gestured with her finger for Thales to come over.

"Gilbert will explain all this theoretical knowledge to you during the training. Now, attack me with all your might! I want to appraise your existing basics."

Thales watched, stupefied, as Jines put her hands behind her back and stood still in the middle of the field, and he continued staring until Jines opened her mouth to urge him again.

'Alright, practice and level up. Isn't this what the older generation loved the most?' Thales finally took a breath. He decided not to take out his dagger after some contemplation.

The next moment, with street-fighting skills that would pass for a child beggar, Thales lunged towards Jines.

Without even moving her supporting foot, Jines easily tripped Thales—who had lunged with too much energy.

Bang!

Gilbert slowly began his explanation. "Martial arts is the oldest and most long-standing skill in human history. Human history is one built where they continuously waged war against other races and amongst themselves.

"Thousands of years ago, in the process of fighting for the right to survive in this world, human beings gradually categorized the skills and patterns involved in using weapons or fighting bare-handed."

Thales was tripped for a second time, tumbling onto the practice ground with his face dusty and dirty.

"Compared to other races, the human physical constitution falls way behind, and thus, they utilized these crafts and skills to win against the strong even if the humans were weaker, to fight against many even if the humans were few, and to wrestle those who are bigger in size compared to the humans.

"After a long time, some of the fighters who have mastered superb skills through such battles awakened powers within themselves that far exceeded human imagination.

"Instead of merely 'struggling' and 'resisting', these powers granted human beings other choices in the world. Different powers came with different advantages, such as outstanding speed, nimble reaction, superb observation, and extraordinary strength. There are too many to count."

This time, Thales nimbly dodged Jines' leg, which was trying to trip him again, and cleverly grasped her thigh-high boots. However, he was immediately kicked down again by Jines' cunning use of her strength.

"By relying on these powers, these group of superior human beings rode on warhorses, led skilled fighters, and embarked on a journey towards the dangerous world.

"These were the earliest batch of knights..." Gilbert heaved a deep sigh and watched Thales, who was in a pathetic and disheveled state, fall onto the floor for the fourth time. He continued, "and those powers that they have awakened are collectively known as 'superpowers'.

"Today, after the Battle of Eradication, the humans, especially swordsmen, like to refer to those powers as 'Powers of Eradication'.

"Due to the emergence of 'superpowers', the world established classifications of such abilities for the first time. For those who are agile in using fighting techniques and are refined fighters, we commonly label them as 'ordinary class'.

"The elites who have mastered superpowers or other such abilities, and are capable of going into extreme detail when it comes to their control over their bodies and spotting the finest detail while observing things, and who are highly proficient when it came to fighting and battling have already surpassed the domain of ordinary human beings. This is why," having said that, Gilbert's eyes sparkled brilliantly as he finished his sentence, "we call them 'supra class'."

"Enough!"

Jines raised her left hand to stop Thales, who was unwilling to stop and wanted to continue lunging forward. She then pushed him onto the sandy surface.

"Quick-witted and good at dodging, knows how to use the greatest amount of strength possible, it's just that his body has not matured yet. I already know what to teach him." Jines exhaled, turned and took two sets of wooden swords and shields from the

weapons rack. She threw the smaller set towards Thales, who was all over the place while trying to grab it.

'It's so heavy.'

Thales laboriously straightened the shield and imitated Jines in using the leather straps behind the wooden shield to bind and secure it to his left hand. However, he immediately realized that the posture put a huge burden on one side of his shoulders and arms.

Thales held the wooden sword with his right hand. 'My goodness, compared to JC's dagger, this wooden sword might as well be those water vats in the Abandoned Houses!'

"Tilt your body with your left leg forward and right leg behind! Place your weight between both of your legs and adjust it accordingly towards the back when defending or receiving impact. When attacking, tip your weight forward.

"Raise your shield and point it directly towards your enemy! Center all your defenses towards your chest on the shield - don't block your eyes!" Jines' tone suddenly became cold and stern. "No matter what, always raise the shield in your left hand up high! There are only two situations where you can put it down. When you are dead, or when the enemy dies!"

Thales strenuously raised his left arm. Soon afterward, it began aching.

"Whip your right arm around and treat the sword as if it is your second forearm. Use the weight of your shield and the first-half of your body, then wave it as though you are using a whip!"

Thales—who was so tired that he was panting—raised the sword in his right hand shakily. He swayed it left and right with great effort while Gilbert's words resounded beside his ears.

"Aha! It's the Northland Military Swords Style—the sword style that has a long history." At this moment, Count Caso's words were full of reminiscence and reverence.

"In the bard's poems, this sword style is the ordinary people's final weapon; the knight's body of fortitude, the Northland's barrier of ice and snow, and the orc's nemesis in the battlefields."

His following sentence made Thales widen his eyes.

"Of course, it was also the sword style where superpowers originated from."

Chapter 36

Starlit Night Alliance (One)

Two hours later.

"Watch your steps! Steady your breath! The key to the 'Iron Body' style lies in your feet. The instant you are attacked, adjust the distance between both of your legs and spread out your strength! If you don't want to die, raise your shield towards the enemy!"

Jines' crystal-clear voice shot up into the air and a merciless strike followed.

Thales clenched his teeth tightly, swung the sword in his right hand, which spurred his body to whirl along. The blood vessels in his left arm bulged as he used his shoulder-strength to raise up the disproportionately heavy, wooden shield with all his might. He bent his right leg slightly and prepared to slide it further away according to the blow received to reduce the impact.

Boom!

Gilbert, who was observing the battle from the sidelines, closed his eyes gently.

After Jines' sword hit the bottom part of his shield, Thales lost his balance for the twenty-fifth time and fell on the sand again. But this time, he had exhausted all his strength and could not raise the shield in his hand anymore.

'D-Damn it.'

The boy panted heavily and tried his best to raise his head and chest. However, the heavy shield weighed down on his left breast, making him unable to struggle up to his feet from the floor.

This woman cum his father's lover had been waving the sword continuously for two hours. But why- why does she show no signs of fatigue at all?

"The Northland Military Sword Style originated from the age of ancient chauvinistic

countries over three thousand years ago. It took shape during the age of feudal kings, which was before the age of the ancient empires." As if able to read Thales' mind, Gilbert's voice resounded in the empty plot. "Based on the records, the elves and the dragons were engaged in fierce battle during that time, and the feudal kings who reigned in the north were invaded by ancient orcs...

"This sword style was developed to battle fearsome opponents—whose strength and size far surpass human beings—such as the ancient orcs, or even dragons." Gilbert looked earnestly at Thales lying on the floor, and spoke softly, "This is the oldest combative sword style recorded in human history. Under such alarmingly huge disadvantages, humanity fought in battles until they almost sank into despair, and as they engaged in almost fatal resistances and suicidal charges, a group of knights became the first to awaken superpowers. Those powers are now known as the 'Powers of Eradication', and those knights became the earliest supra class fighters in human history."

Gilbert's eyes shone with a brilliant sparkle. "Lady Jines is one of the best among the supra class. Excluding the unique Power of Eradication she possesses, her observation skills, power, balance, and almost all physical attributes are on a different level than yours. The gap between the both of you is comparable to the gap between the tough, bold, and powerful ancient orcs and the weak, small humans in the past."

Thales looked at Jines in awe and embarrassment. Honestly, even now, he did not know how to get along with his father's lover. She was exercising her wrist with a relaxed expression, as if paying no attention to Gilbert's praises.

"As a superpower is further used and the user accumulates more experience towards it, it will become stronger and stronger. The knights began learning how to wield their massive and profound powers, and to control their immeasurable strengths to the extent of having complete control over them. Compared to the supra class, these knights—who are a step above—possess almost immeasurable strength and matchless skills. They began to understand the fundamentals of power and battles. They can transform freely, fight without limitations, and finish a battle with the highest efficiency and the smallest loss possible." Gilbert took a step forward and nodded his head at a spot in the air with a barely noticeable move.

"They are known as the supreme class, the strongest warriors that have surpassed the limits of their powers."

Thales looked at the sky absent-mindedly and thought of Asda, who could control the air to her heart's desire, and Yodel, who moved like a phantom.

"Ordinary class, supra class, and supreme class. This classification of power spread widely to people of all races around the world after humanity prospered." Gilbert looked at the weather and nodded at Jines. "The ancient orcs, the ancient elves, even the psionics and... began using this system of classification.

"All of these originated from the ancient Northland Military Sword Style—from the courage to fight the orcs and the dragons for the sake of survival." Gilbert's words put Thales in an absent-minded state.

"Now, the ancient orcs are no longer a threat, and the dragons are extinct. The Northland Military Sword Style is no longer passed down to the people. Even within the army of Eckstedt Kingdom, the kingdom that prides itself for having Northland blood and occupies the land of the ancient Northland, this swordsmanship has long since been abandoned. Now, the only places that retain the full legacy of the Northland Military Sword Style are Constellation and the Tower of Eradication.

"Miss Jines is one of the few people in the world proficient in this skill. Young Sir Thales, when it comes to this sword style that once saved our ancestors, please harbor respect in your heart and practice relentlessly."

'A sword style used to battle orcs and dragons? No wonder.' Thales thought gloomily after snapping out of his daze, 'I was thinking about why the sword felt like lead when I swung it.'

Recalling the way he, like an idiot, raised the shield and waved the sword (how it led him around), his footwork (pulled by the inertia of the shield) and his training with Jines (being trained by her), he felt as if he was just being whacked around like a sandbag for two hours. He could not help but heaved a sigh while feeling speechless. and with a face full of regret, he fell backward.

"That will be all for this morning; your wounds from before are showing signs of tearing." Jines looked at the sun in the sky, threw her sword and shield down, and spoke with her usual, cool expression.

"These three sets of defense tactics of the Northland Military Sword Style will be your homework for the week. As for horse-riding..." Jines looked at the foal happily dancing

around a butterfly by the hitching post. She then looked at Thales, who struggled to free his left arm from the wooden shield. She, too, heaved a sigh and shook her head. "Go take a bath and eat your lunch. Gilbert has specially prepared indoor lessons at one in the afternoon for you."

'Afternoon lessons? My god, do I have to self-study at night, too?'

Thales, who was used to living the disorderly life of a postgraduate student, heaved another sigh. As he felt his whole body ache, he closed his eyes and resigned himself to fate.

Constellation's most exalted, illegitimate child resignedly took off the equipment from his body with great difficulty (pulled his left arm out of the shield), and limped into Mindis Hall.

He only had an hour to bathe and eat.

"I have to admit, his comprehension and ability to learn things is good. After only two hours, he had tentatively understood the fundamental spirit of this sword style." Gilbert watched Thales leave and broke the silence, he nodded his head lightly as he spoke, "When I was his age, I used my body to practice using the sword. This child uses his brain to learn the sword."

"Compared to this- Do not tell me that your observation skills are so bad that you did not notice the abnormalities of his body!" Watching Thales' figure disappear, Jines' face suddenly became grave. As she talked to Gilbert, who was beside her, she sized up the air around them with suspicion. "I still remember that the person with that cursed mask can see even a speck of dust a hundred meters away."

"Stop looking, Yodel is not nearby." Watching Jines' nervous actions, Gilbert put his hands behind his back and spoke in a level-headed manner, "Ever since Thales was unexpectedly kidnapped by the Blood Clan, Yodel has tailed him every single moment without ever leaving his side.

"And we noticed," Gilbert spoke and frowned slightly, "that child is only around seven years' old, and has sustained considerable injuries two days ago. However, in two days, he had almost completely recovered... and could practice the sword under the sun for two hours without much difficulty... no wonder the Bloodline Lamp, which is used to detect those with the blood of the royal family—did not react for a whole seven

years..."

"With this physical constitution, he cannot be described as a 'normal human being' anymore, he's practically..." He heaved a sigh and tried his best not to think of the other possibility. "Jadestar Family. As expected of the oldest surviving royal bloodline in the world."

Jines was also silent for a while and tactfully did not say anything else.

The female official bent down and swept the dust off her boots. "Speaking of vampires, why did you reveal Thales' identity to them and invite them to stay in Mindis Hall? Do you really believe in the agreement between Thales and the distressed Archduchess? After all, he is only seven. And you should be aware that the vampires have killed our people before; we can't trust them. Besides, to the vampires, we are an unexpected accident; it is impossible for them to trust us, either."

"You have already spoken the answer." Gilbert's eyes sparkled as he thought of the old Blood Clansman who had a still and deadly countenance, but was full of wisdom. "It is precisely because both parties lack trust, fear each other, and even threaten each other that I did all these things."

"That is why we have to use the secrets we have and things that will benefit both sides to tie down each other. This is what you would call tacit understanding and cunningness in terms of diplomatic relations. It's not the same as a clear and straightforward, investigative search."

"Hmph, you're just trying to be mysterious and secretive." It was as if Jines was reminded of unpleasant memories. As she left the training field and walked into the hall, she said with annoyance, "Another Morat."

"Thank you for your praise, respectable Lady Jines." Gilbert tilted the hat on his head and laughed tactfully. "I do not deserve such an honor as to be ranked alongside the head of the Kingdom's Secret Intelligence Department."

'And...'

Gilbert did not take Jines' impolite disregard to heart. He thought internally, 'Although that child is only seven years old, when it comes to guile, he is definitely not inferior to the Archduchess who is a few hundred years old.'

.....

When Gilbert and Jines arrived at Thales' study simultaneously half an hour later, Thales, who had bathed hastily and was having his meal, was watching the expressionless, red-eyed, little girl with a frown on his face.

Her followers—Istrone and Rolana—were having an unfriendly stare-down with the Swordsmen of Eradication who had Thales completely surrounded till not even a fly would be able to pass through them.

"Step back, vampire." A bodyguard who looked like the leader was glaring angrily from behind his helmet and spoke with unpleasantness, "We do not welcome you here."

"Don't get me wrong. I don't like you people that much either, you mortal creatures." Istrone's nonchalant words further annoyed the bodyguards. "Do you remember that I slaughtered eight people like you just yesterday?" he spoke with a sarcastic and provocative tone.

The frowning Thales bit a mouthful of carefully seasoned beef short ribs from the fork in his hand. He had not eaten this delicacy since he transmigrated here and was so touched that his heart gasped in admiration. At the same time, he carefully avoided the obviously problematic gaze of the baby-faced little girl sitting across from him.

It was just a pity that this taste will probably never compare to the dog meat he once ate together with Jala.

Thales observed the situation before him and heaved a sigh. 'What a headache.'

"You will never have such a chance again, despicable rat that hides in pots!" The head swordsman's tone had dropped to freezing point and the silver sword at his waist was one foot out of its sheath. "Why don't you try and take another step forward? I am very eager to avenge the death of my comrades. Or I can just pull open the curtains and let you all bask in the sunlight."

The countenance of the handsome blonde Blood Clansman turned sour, and he decided to go one step forward.

"Don't get riled up, boys." Rolana pulled her fuming cousin one step backward just in time. Although her lips were curled in a smile, her tone was stern and serious. "Servants, step back. Your master and our master have an agreement."

Looking at the Swordsmen of Eradication in front of her who could not wait to kill them, Rolana's playful countenance became even more vibrant. "This was what your master said—we are allies now. Shouldn't we forget the animosity of the past? After all, it's just eight lives..."

The emotions of the Swordsmen of Eradication became more unstable. A few of them even clenched their teeth so hard that the sounds of them grating their teeth could be heard behind their helmets.

'As expected of cousin sister,' Istrone thought inwardly, especially when he looked at the angered guards who had to restrain themselves. 'It really makes my heart soar.'

Jines, who was outside the room frowned and was about to walk in when Gilbert grabbed her arm. The gray-haired ex-diplomat shook his head with a mysterious look on his face and pointed at their little master, who was sitting on a chair behind the guards.

Jines made a puzzled face.

Her puzzlement continued until she saw Thales, who had finished his last bite of food and put down the cutlery, burping in satisfaction and sliding down from the chair.

'What should I do?' Looking at the meaningful gaze of the three Blood Clansmen, Thales contemplated the problem.

However, he soon had an answer.

"Thank you for your protection, Chora. With you around, I'm very assured of my own safety," Thales said with a smile and tugged the lower hem of the head swordsman's armor.

Chora, who had laughed when his stomach was poked by Thales on his first morning here to determine "whether the guards were made of stone", was the leader of these guards. He was also the one who arranged for the guards to kill the attacking mercenaries one by one.

He knew that when it came to these loyal guards, he should not wave his hand and dismiss them with authority and arrogance—like what the main characters in most simplistic novels do. Moreover, to protect him, they had recently sacrificed eight of their most reliable comrades. To face their arch enemies and not immediately take out

their swords to kill was already a rare show of self-restraint. Although they were already allies on paper, but to pretend that nothing happened and to dismiss his own people in front of outsiders would only turn the guards' hearts cold with disappointment, even though it would feel great to dismiss them with a wave of his hand.

Thales put on a stern expression. "I need all of you to do me a favor."

"We will follow your orders."

Although his facial expression could not be seen, the head guard's respectful tone said it all. The swordsmen who were able to stay guard here were all the most trusted and elite private soldiers of the Jadestar family. They were not informed of the situation, but based on the task received and the interactions of the past few days, the guards have made almost accurate deductions regarding the boy's identity—who was personally brought in by Gilbert and Yodel.

"Due to past incidents, I do not trust the handsome Sir Istrone Corleone, and his beautiful but equally dangerous cousin sister, Lady Rolana Corleone.

"They have caused me plenty of humiliation. Their existence makes me troubled, worried, and frightened." Thales frowned and clenched his teeth tightly while he spoke.

As though there was really great enmity between them.

Istrone and Rolana were shocked and looked at the Archduchess behind them at the same time. However, the latter did not bat an eyelid.

"We only need your word, Young Sir..." Chora's gaze behind his helmet became sharper. The sword on his waist was drawn another foot. "And our swords will leave their sheaths for you."

Having heard that, the Swordsmen pressed their hands on the hilts of their swords. Bound by a common hatred for the enemy, their gazes became more and more unpleasant.

"Very good, I want their heads so much..." Thales' countenance was cold, and he glared at Istrone with deadly eyes.

The swordsmen took a step forward together and vaguely surrounded the Blood Clansmen.

Istrone looked at the boy's expression, his heart jumping a little.

Rolana bared a fierce expression and unfolded her arms.

'It can't be.' Istrone felt an unreasonable fear in his heart and took a step back without noticing it, until the Archduchess's cryptolalia was heard next to his ears. "Steady, Isa." This childish voice that only Blood Clansmen could hear put Istrone's mind at ease. "He does not intend to turn hostile."

"...But because of the sacred alliance, I cannot hurt them in my own house...

"That is why, apart from this... young lady, chase the other two people out into the corridor, Chora." Thales pouted and hugged his arms tight as he ordered coldly.

"If they so dare to disturb the private conversation between me and Lady Serena Corleone..." Thales' eyes shone with a cold glint, making the already traumatized Istrone anxious. The boy turned his head and continued to speak to Chora mercilessly, "Chora, and everyone else... you all will have a valid excuse to take your revenge.

"Especially that one with blond hair."

Istrone's heart tightened.

"If our swords leave their sheaths, we definitely will not disappoint you." Chora nodded with a determined gaze and extended his arms towards the door of the study.

"Vampires, you have heard it."

"Get out. The corridor is where you people belong."

Istrone, who had a furious expression wanted to say something else but was stopped beforehand by his cousin sister.

Rolana perfectly hid her shock and smiled mysteriously. She then respectfully bowed towards the little loli, Serena, and dragged Istrone out of the study.

Outside the room, Gilbert flashed a smile, and, along with the astonished Jines, made

way for the guards and the Blood Clansmen. The two groups, who were staring at each other with caution left the study and continued their stand-off at a corridor some distance away.

"Good afternoon, Sir Corleone and Lady Corleone." Gilbert bowed neatly. His elegant mustache curled up slightly. "I know that the members of the Blood Clan have exceptional hearing. It is much too easy to listen to the events in the study from here. I wonder if eavesdropping counts as 'disturbing' the private conversation between Sir Thales and Lady Corleone?"

The guard, Chora, who was standing beside them and the rest of the swordsmen immediately walked towards them with an imposing aura. "You want to eavesdrop?"

Rolana's smile immediately faded while Istrone's face turned green.

When she saw the angered swordsmen forcing the Blood Clan to the stairs and stopped moving while they were there, Jines became absorbed in her thoughts.

'If that is the case... ' Jines lowered her head silently. 'Then what Gilbert said is true—he's really an intelligent and level-headed boy.

'But he's a little too intelligent and level-headed.'

Thales breathed a sigh as the crimson eyed loli watched him strangely. He closed the heavy door to the study and considerately drew the curtains to block the sunlight.

The study on the second floor was perfectly soundproofed. Gilbert had assured him that even the Blood Clan would not be able to pick up a single sound with their hearing.

"Alright, we were in a hurry yesterday, but now..." Thales exhaled and said sternly, "Let us talk in detail about the clauses in the alliance.

"And go especially into the details about my blood and how you would serve me."

"Wewy well." Due to the size of her body shrinking to that of a small loli, Miss Serena spoke with a lisp. She too, nodded her head seriously, "Why don't we add in your status into the clauses that need to be discussed as well?"

Puzzlement appeared on Thales' face, but his expression changed drastically when the

crimson-eyed loli said her next words.

This Archduchess, the woman in the shape of a small girl, the true heir of the Corleone family, the rightful sovereign of the Hill of Pain, Her Highness Serena L.A. Corleone, spoke softly with a lisp.

"And that is the probwem of you nod gettin' your birthwight as a pwince acknowledged even aftwer such a long time has passed."

What they did not know was that when Thales had skillfully dodged the guards and the Blood Clan's irresolvable grudge and was negotiating with Serena, Chris Corleone was hiding in the shadows of the chimney, which was right above the second floor's study, all so that he could avoid the sunlight. His posture was bizarre, and his face was expressionless.

"Alright." The pale Chris Corleone's ears twitched and turned his head to speak, "Our men didn't start fighting. I believe that Her Highness should be negotiating with that young friend of ours.

"We're both supreme class fighters, you know? There's no need for us to remain in such an awkward position, right?"

Right across the old Blood Clansman was Yodel Cato, the masked, strange man who had remained silent from the beginning until now. Only when he said these words did Yodel put away the short sword he held in his hand back into his shirt, and he gradually faded away.

Chapter 37

Starlit Night Alliance (Two)

"The next king? Last night, your followers exaggerated your status." The girl with the baby face pouted. She was dressed in clothes fit for a child, which had been prepared for Thales, and she was looking quite a funny and cute sight as she sat down on the carpet beside the fireplace and continued speaking in her lisp, "But we have realized that right now, you are not even a prince."

'Of course not. In the entire kingdom, people who know that the king has a son can be counted with less than ten fingers,' Thales thought internally. 'Should I have told you that Gilbert deliberately said that because he got annoyed looking at that blonde showing off?' Thales rolled his eyes in his heart.

"I thought..." Thales took a deep breath, looked at the pair of red eyes in front of him and said, "we have already agreed in Vine Manor. Since my blood is delicious, if you forget about draining my blood dry in one go, I will regularly provide you with a small amount of blood. While enjoying my blood, you must serve me, and I will ensure that all of you have a safe place to stay in Constellation."

"But you do not possess the power," Serena said slowly but surely, "to protect us."

"Alright, it's true that I am only an illegitimate child; that is why, it's not me, but my father who will guarantee your safety..."

Serena stared right at him and broke him off suddenly. "But you are not your father—you are not the king."

"That is why," Thales exasperatedly said, "I am really sorry, but you and your people are already at Mindis Hall, and we already know your secret. I guess the Covendier family would not welcome you back either..."

"How about a pint." The red-eyed loli said with an expressionless face.

"What?"

"Your bwood. I want half a pwint of it daily." She looked somberly at Thales' eyes.

"Half a... pint, daily?" Thales narrowed his eyes and looked at the Eastern Peninsula's Archduchess. All this just for my blood?

'This boys' blood is unique,' Serena thought to herself. 'It was exactly this blood, full of life and energy, which had roused me from my deep, muddled sleep. Of course, to realize that someone was biting my neck the moment I woke up was not very pleasing.' Serena pouted her lips in annoyance and touched her neck.

'Thales, don't forget that yesterday, the mummified version of this "little girl" almost took your life,' Thales thought in disdain. Recalling that a mummy had sucked on his neck like a suction pump... Thales rotated his neck unnaturally as well with mixed feelings.

Both quietly stared at each other until one of them broke the silence.

"Are you kidding?! Half a pint daily? Why don't you just suck all my blood straightaway?" Thales stood on tiptoes (he would not be able to reach the table otherwise because he was too short) and smacked the table, staring back at her without showing any sign of weakness. But he still felt apprehensive when he occasionally thought of her mummified appearance.

"I ardently wish that I could devouwer ewevy single dwop of bwood in your bwody." Serena's red eyes glared at him as she replied in a serious and eerie tone, "But to have you supply bwood to me long-term is a deal that is much more worthwhile."

"Aren't you a calculative person?" Thales replied sarcastically.

"A qwarter pint daily; I need to wecover as fwast as pwossible." Serena's gaze became cold and her tone was final.

"Do you think I'm a cockroach, that blood is replenished every time I level up?" Thales clenched his teeth tightly as he met her gaze squarely. "To give you blood daily—not a chance!"

"I do not undwerstand what you are talking about." The aloof loli efficiently ignored the crazed words the boy accidentally let spill out of his mouth. "Once ewevy week, two pints."

"Once every half-year! A-tenth of a pint! And this is only for the sake of our amicable agreement," Thales said fiercely.

"Once evewy two weeks, one-and-a-half pints. Pwease use your actions to pwove your amity."

"At most, once a month! I need time to synthesize new blood after losing it okay!"

Serena slowly stood from the floor. Her red irises gazed towards Thales, making the latter shudder. "Brat, do nod chawenge my patience. My interest in your bwood is the only reason you are still standing here and bwething air."

Serena's eyes narrowed, and her unchanging facial expression suddenly became cold.

"If we decide to weave without caring for all the sacrifices we have to suffer, your pweople will not be able to stop us. Moreover—" Serena's eyes moved about mysteriously but she did not look away from Thales' gaze, making the boy's hair raise.

"This pwace conceals Constellation's secret heir. Do you think that the lords and nobwles would be interested in this?"

Thales felt himself shudder in fear. 'This damned old witch,' Thales criticized internally. However, experiences with field research from his past life made him aware that as the other party in a negotiation, he must not show any weakness.

"Sure thing." Thales tried his best to force a pleasant smile. "Your younger sister must miss you very much, too. Especially after you came to Constellation for a vacation, and even transformed into a cute and plump little girl.

"I won't be able to become the heir at the moment, nor will you be able to return to Night Kingdom. Since we are so compatible—"

Thales smiled even more delightfully. "Why don't you just marry me?"

The moment he said that, Serena's expression did not change. She did not move her gaze, and neither did she move her body.

But for some reason, a shudder wracked Thales' body at that moment, and he felt a chill that seeped right into his bones.

Both parties stared at each other for more than ten seconds.

Amidst the silence, Serena slowly and softly uttered a sentence.

"It seems that you weally intend for our relations to turn sour." As she spoke, Serena suddenly cracked a smile, revealing her tiny fangs.

Thales was shocked.

His right hand—hidden behind his body—trembled. JC's dagger was already ready in his hand and could be used to strike at any time.

"Wewy well, then." Serena curled up the corners of her lips mysteriously and licked her fangs.

'From this angle and with this distance, I can continue talking by beating around the bush with her for more than ten seconds.'

Thales lowered his head, furrowed his brows, and swallowed hard.

If Yodel had not bumped into Chris, he would have been able to rush here. The guards, Jines, and Gilbert were also at the corridor. But Istrone and Rolana... Damn it!

Since they reached the worst possible outcome, Thales had no choice but to accept it.

He bent his calves slightly and spread his feet apart. He prepared to raise his left arm high and held the dagger steadily with his right hand. He was obviously about to pull off a standard 'Iron Body' style.

'Northland Military Sword Style... although I only practiced it for two hours, I hope that you are well worth the effort.' Thales laughed wryly in his heart.

For the first time, Serena suddenly flashed an unsettling smile. Her young voice rang in the air. It sounded especially scary to Thales' ears.

"Then, I have no choice but to compwomise. I will follow what you said. Once a month it is, then. As for the number wof pints, Thales, it is up to you to decide."

'Use my left arm as a shield and block her first attack. Based on yesterday's experience with the mummy, I don't know if she will... eh?'

Thales then processed what Serena was saying. 'What? Compromise?' Thales' mouth widened in shock to the point that it was big enough to fit two of Serena's fists. 'I was about to deal with her 'gently', but the enemy... surrendered? Why aren't things going according to the script?'

Something scarier happened after that. Two faint dimples appeared on Serena's adorable face. The little loli smiled bashfully. "My dear Thales, since I have compwomised, shouldn't you do something to show your sincerity too?"

Thales frowned and looked at her with suspicion. He found that he could not react to the expressionless, silent, and emotionless girl suddenly transforming into a loli with a bright smile—akin to a blooming flower.

He could only answer with a hoarse voice by going with the flow, "What... *cough cough*... show you... how?"

The little girl's smile became even brighter.

At that moment, Thales suddenly thought that those strange red eyes were actually quite beautiful.

"The young and capable Prince Thales." She smiled amicably. "Let's form an awiance. I will assist you in gettin' through this cwis... so that you will be cwowned successfuwy."

"And you will suppwort me..." Serena's pupils shone with a strange bright light. "In seizing back my throne."

Thales was stunned. 'Seizing back... her throne? The Eastern Peninsula's... Night Kingdom?'

The cute girl blinked.

"Erm, this goal is too far away." Thales scratched his head. His dagger had long since been tucked back into his pocket. He spoke with some slight awkwardness and hesitance, "If I really become king one day, then, uh, based on the situation..."

Before he even finished speaking, the loli's eyes sparkled brilliantly and she slowly inched towards him. Thales stared in befuddlement as the strange girl extended both hands and softly held his right hand. "I know that Thales reawy needs me!"

Before Thales could pull his hand back, he saw the pair of red eyes watching him with a teary gaze.

Blinking her unusually coquettish eyes, she pouted her lips and shook her arm slightly, just like how a normal, playful, little girl would. As he stared into her gaze, a shudder swept through Thales' entire body.

His mind felt dizzy for some reason...

"For the sake of not revealing your identity, you cannot simply let us go." Serena bit her bottom lip and curled her lips into a smile that would have enamored other people. "And because of my value and my sensitive identity, you can't get rid of me easily, either..."

"This is why we have no choice but to form a mutually beneficial alliance." The girl used the soft skin on her arms to gently rub the back of his hand. Her eyes shone with an odd but submissive light. "Instead of being forced by the situation and being dragged along by the flow, just like what happened to us in the manor, isn't becoming allies and helping each other something very common? This way, both of us will feel more unrestrained..."

Thales pulled his arm back with a disgusted expression. However, the odd sensation behind his hand lingered.

"If this reduces the animosity between us..." Thales heaved a sigh. "We can work together, temporarily. However, for now, we can only provide you shelter. As you can see, I am in a very awkward situation too. Before my status is acknowledged, I am unable to help you regain your throne."

"Okay, okay." Serena's expression suddenly turned cheerful, like a normal girl who just found her doll. She bit her bottom lip and nodded continuously with a delightful smile. "I understand, I understand! I knew that Thales treats me the best!" Because of her smile, the girl's eyes turned into the shape of crescent moons, and she held onto Thales' arm again.

Thales raised his brow. He was not used to her being like this. Out of reflex, he wanted to pull his arm back, but the girl held onto him with a tight grip.

Serena's expression changed again. Her smile turned into a hesitant and hurt look.

"It's just that..." The girl pursed her lips like she was being wronged and poked Thales' arm.

"Just that' what?" Thales quirked his brow again, feeling as if he could not handle this anymore.

"It's just that it's a bit..." Serena shook Thales' arms and spoke with a pitiful expression, "One-tenth of a pwint per month is a bit too little; I will starve to death..."

Thales' face turned black. "Why don't you go and suck someone else's blood?"

"Becwause I feel that Thales' blood is the most spwecial one." The girl looked like she was about to cry. Blinking her eyes as she spoke, "We are good allies, aren't we...?"

Thales furrowed his brows. His head was beginning to ache.

In the end, the agreement of blood provision was set at one-eighth of a pint per month. Thales had calculated this with his fingers for a while—it was not a lot.

However, he still felt that he was on the losing end of the deal.

"Obtwaining the hwelp of two supweme class elites, and a supwa class ewite, through this," Serena suddenly reverted into an expressionless loli and spoke with a piercing gaze, "Your jwourney towards becoming the heir will only becwome smoother."

'True.' Thales thought gloomily, 'With the support of a strong nation in the Western Peninsula, your journey towards seizing back your throne would surely become smoother, too.'

"And, for the sake of my pwomise to Thales, I will work hard to hwelp you become the heir and ascend the thwone!"

'Promise?' Thales' face twitched. 'I obviously didn't agree to that just now. Why is she making assumptions? But, eh, what's up with that face? Why did it suddenly become cold again?'

As he watched the loli sashay out of the room, Thales suddenly realized that his body was drenched in cold sweat—he constantly felt that something was not quite right.

"Oh yeah, I have a question." As she was just about to leave, the loli turned and spoke

with her usual, expressionless face, "What is the secret of your blood? How could such a small amount awaken me?"

"What you took yesterday was obviously not 'a small amount' of blood!" The baffled boy grumbled in annoyance. "To answer this question, please refer to books, reference materials, or other forms of relevant documents and literature. You can ask my parents directly if you want to!"

Surprisingly, Serena nodded her head seriously. "If the chance arises, I will." She raised her gaze. "Your blood and my strength, your throne and my throne, our alliance is actually very beneficial for us."

In the next moment, much to his surprise, Thales saw Serena swaying her young body while taking a step back.

"For this, I apologize for my and my followers' impertinence. I earnestly hope for your tolerance and forgiveness." Serena bowed again, her plump little hand held her imaginary skirt. She spoke softly with her childish voice, "future Prince Thales Jadestar."

Thales was stunned. 'Thales Jadestar.' This was the first time somebody called him by this name.

It was just as Serena said. As of then, he was not even a prince.

'The transition from child beggar to a prince. As expected, I'm still not used to it,' Thales thought with distress.

'This witch.' Thales, who was drenched in cold sweat, kept reminding himself. 'And she was completely expressionless just now, too. Should I be saying, 'As expected of the ex-Archduchess?''

Having thought that, Thales heaved a deep sigh, feeling a little defeated from the day's negotiations. He earnestly extended his hand and helped the loli up. Although the two children's actions looked funny, their expressions had turned extremely serious.

"Your Highness Serena Corleone, I accept your friendship." Thales extended his right hand in front of Serena with a serious gaze. "Starting from now, we are allies."

Serena watched him with sparkling red eyes. After a moment, she also extended her

plump little hand and placed it in his palm. "Of course. Constellation and Night. May our coopewation be a pweasant one."

The two little hands held and shook each other lightly.

"And also, in the future, ask your followers to stay away from my guards. The hatred between them is one that cannot be resolved!"

Thales looked at the little girl in front of her—who only reached his shoulders—and spoke meaningfully, "Next time, there's no harm in you talking to me regarding the issue of your restoration. There's no need to waste time and effort testing my attitude towards this matter. Istrone's acting skills were too horrible. When it comes to this, we need to be straightforward and trust one another."

"Trust?" Serena's red pupils constricted a little and she nodded. "Of course, future Pwince Thales. If you inhewit the thwone, and we both estabwish a Starlit Night alliance, our relationship will become a special one..."

Serena flashed a strange smile. "For the sake of both our countries' futures, we might even estabwish a marriage contwact—of course we need to trust one another!"

The dejected Thales felt his face twitch. He was stunned so speechless that he felt like puking. 'Can someone please come and take this lisp-afflicted person away?!

Chapter 38

Battle of Eradication (One)

Three in the afternoon.

"What is it?" In the study, Thales put down the quill he was using to copy the alphabet that was used by the public during the era. He waved his hand impatiently and looked at Gilbert—who had been staring at him for the past hour.

"Excuse me for my rudeness, Sir Thales," Gilbert spoke with a soft smile, "but you might be a natural-born diplomat—provided that you do not choose to become an astronomically wealthy businessman."

'If I knew he would react this way, I wouldn't have told him what happened—I should have just told him that I played hide and seek with that little girl for half an hour in the room.' Thales thought gloomily and crossed out the lopsided 'S' below his quill.

Thales was very annoyed. There was no other reason for his annoyance. After the negotiation with Serena, whenever Thales thought of the Archduchess' flexible and versatile expressions, as well as her transition between icy coldness to friendliness, he felt that something was not quite right. So Thales had asked Gilbert to analyze the situation for him just now.

To put it simply—Thales had fallen for Serena's trap.

It might have seemed like Serena was forced to compromise on the issue of blood provision, but they were in Mindis Hall—everyone, including Gilbert, Yodel, Jines, and even his unreliable father, His Majesty the King, would not watch idly if half a pint of blood was drawn from his body daily. Which was to say that—

One-eighth of a pint of blood monthly was obviously within her estimation! So, without making any real compromise, Serena managed to bargain her way into making an ambivalent promise from Thales!

'Help her retrieve her throne?' Thales realized with annoyance that he was the losing party in the negotiation.

"Businessman? Diplomat? Why do I feel as though you are laughing at me in your heart?" Thales lowered his head and opened another page of the 'Cahill's Falling Leaves Poetry Collection' Gilbert gave him. He copied the sentences, identifying the individual words and their usage.

'The night was about to welcome light, the sky had yet to become bright. The holy sun's former splendor was hidden in the lands.

'The land was about to shatter, the sea about to spill over. The evil demons gathered their strength in the dark sky.'

After he copied this duplet containing the style of poetry usually applied when orientals wrote about day and night, Thales pouted his lips and tried to understand the meaning behind it.

In the beginning, Gilbert was especially worried that Thales would have a weak foundation to culture and tailored a massive plan to speedily improve his language and writing especially for Thales. This was because typical street rogues usually could not recognize any letters other than their own names and the numbers written on coins. This was the norm.

However, ever since he transmigrated to this place, Thales had paid close attention to the words around him. Together with his ability to speak the language and his brain—that at some unknown point of time, seemed to run like those computers that had their RAM increased—it only took him a little over an hour to master basic alphabet recognition and learn how to write them. After that, Thales easily entered the stage where he could spell individual words and copy long sentences.

His progress was so fast that even Gilbert was in awe. Again, he could only attribute it to the Jadestar Royal Family's outstanding blood.

Thales rolled his eyes at Gilbert's reaction over this.

"No, you handled it considerably well." Gilbert walked to his side and watched as he copied the entire ancient poem. "I have asked some people to read up on materials and information about Night Kingdom. Serena Corleone may not be as well known as her younger sister, who is exceptionally skilled when it comes to handling matters, but she is indeed related to the Night Wing King. She was already around even before the Third Peninsular War and might be more than four hundred years old."

"Despite being under our shelter and in an abject situation, she ordered Istrone to coerce you into making a choice between your follower's loyalty and the benefits that come with forming an alliance. She affected your reputation among your followers and then did all she could to remind you about the fact that you are not the heir yet to destroy your self-confidence and courage. Both instances fully exhibited either the cunningness of a Blood Clan Archduchess who has lived for many years, or the intelligence of that supreme class butler.

"Fortunately, you did not let her have her way when it came to this. Instead, you left her with no choice but to act in a manner that was shameless to obtain what she wants."

'I knew it, she's a witch.' Thales spat in his mind and continued copying the poem.

'The Gods fell into the world, hell's river roared. The land transformed, the color of blood spread. The vast army marched on, the snowy mountains collapsed.

'The hero raised his flag, the king lifted his spear. The empire has fallen, the world has darkened. The living were frightened, lonely and homeless.'

'What is this person even writing?' Thales furrowed his brows and read these descriptive sentences. He asked absent-mindedly, "So you just stood there and watched them bully me?"

Gilbert did not say anything. He only watched Thales quietly.

Wait.

The hand which Thales used to hold the quill suddenly froze. He looked as if he had thought of something. His highly efficient brain began automatically collecting every single element and linking them into a paragraph again.

'His identity.

'Serena's identity.

'His promise to help her regain her throne.

'Their treaty of alliance.

'The indifferent Gilbert.

'And Serena's words, "I will work hard to help you become the heir and ascend the throne!"'

"Gilbert," Thales quirked his brows and opened his mouth wide, looking at the former Foreign Affairs Minister in disbelief, "it was you?"

The former Foreign Affairs Minister's mouth curled into a small grin. His mustache curved into elegant arcs.

"Oh yeah, I still remember." Thales exhaled and uttered in realization, "Last night, you were the one who told them about my identity! You didn't do it because you were angry at their impudence and arrogance, nor was it because my status was being undermined by those people." Thales stood up in front of the study table with a dubious gaze. "This was your plan all along!"

Gilbert did not admit nor decline it. He only shrugged his shoulders playfully in a rare show of mischief.

This allowed Thales to confirm his suspicions immediately. 'It was indeed Gilbert's plan! F*ck!'

"You deliberately revealed my identity because you guessed that they might seize this opportunity and take the initiative to negotiate with the heir to the throne while he is still in a dire state. That way, they can strengthen or add to the treaty to obtain the promise that I will help them after I ascend the throne. It might take a long time, but since they are the immortal Blood Clan, they can afford to wait!"

'Damn it!' Thales cursed Serena inwardly, 'That witch obviously had a plan, but still acted as though she was super-anxious to recover her abilities and go back to the Eastern Peninsula!

'Damn old man! Damn witch!' Thales thought in annoyance.

"I guess you have your own reasons for doing so?" Thales let go of his emotions and furrowed his brows.

Gilbert lifted his hat and bowed in his line of vision. "There is no trust between us and the Corleones. We harbor suspicions towards each other. It is extremely dangerous for

us to live under the same roof in the name of cooperation, even though this is our territory."

"As for your blood? Safety?" Gilbert chuckled and spoke darkly. "I never believed that these unreliable things can guarantee a stable cooperation. We might have a fall-out with the Corleones at any possible time and endanger ourselves."

"However, the situation is different now. Your journey to becoming the heir and her mission to seize back the throne are bound together. To obtain your help, she must first help you."

"Although unexpected, you have used a promise that can only be carried out in the future after becoming king in exchange for immediate and reliable help." Gilbert smiled mysteriously. "Obtaining allies by binding them to you using benefits is the essence of politics."

"And helping her regain her throne?" Thales narrowed his eyes.

Gilbert exhaled. His eyes shone with cunning, "If you do not become king, how would you be able to help her regain her throne? As for what you said, regarding me watching idly as they bullied you? It is, of course, part of my duty to share your burdens. However, to develop you into a qualified heir, and to protect you from any sort of harm are both equally important duties to me." Gilbert smiled and spoke, "Serena Corleone is only an abject foreign dignitary and you will be Constellation's future. I thought that I would just let this be a small test to you."

'Small test?' Thales lowered his head and rolled his eyes again.

"Since you had this intention, why didn't you go straight to them and suggest an alliance?" the indignant Thales replied stiffly.

"My young Sir Thales," Gilbert blinked, "diplomatic negotiations are like sword tournaments. Although whoever attacks first gets the first strike...

"...they will at the same time, expose their steps and trails. There is nothing better for us than for them to suggest an alliance."

'I will just quietly watch you act all smart and all that jazz.' The boy shook his head and thought bitterly.

Thales grumbled in annoyance. "What a bad diplomat and politician—to even manipulate your own people."

"Alright." Gilbert only narrowed his eyes and smiled as he lowered his head to look at his pocket watch. "After copying these poems that you do not understand for so long, I am sure you feel tired."

Thales stopped moving the quill in his hand.

"You can rest for a while. Since we are already on the topic of politics and diplomacy, this is an opportunity for us to conduct a history lesson." Gilbert said, smiling, "Obtaining obvious benefits is not the only reason alliances are forged." Gilbert sat on the expensive sofa and tipped his hat. "Imminent crisis also leads to that... As well as shared beliefs."

Thales put down his quill and began paying earnest attention to Gilbert's words.

"This tale depicts how the disunited human beings and the other influential forces within the other races became the most loyal allies, even though they were filled with distrust towards each other." Gilbert's eyes shone with bright light.

Thales suddenly felt that Gilbert had become slightly serious.

"This is what 'Cahill's Falling Leaves Poetry Collection' depicts—the tale of that battle over six hundred years ago."

Count Caso's next sentence made Thales widen his eyes in shock. "That cruel, dark, bloody, horrific and earth-shattering battle depicted in historical poems—The Battle of Eradication."

.....

In the deep and dark secret chamber, an old and raspy voice drifted into the air. "So, the wealthy families are showing signs of activity?"

"Yes, my dear teacher," a cynical, lazy voice replied. "Supreme class elites and plenty of supra class elites are departing from various strange places and gathering at the borders of various county towns in the north. They all share one similarity; investigation shows that none of them have anything to do with nobles and suzerains."

"Can you get the exact date?" the hoarse voice spoke apathetically.

"I'm afraid that it's difficult." The same voice replied with a light-hearted tone, "Even people from the Eckstedt Diplomat Group itself have not finalized their exact route. So, should we send people to continue investigating and inform the king about this?"

After some time, the raspy old voice replied with finality.

"No. Your focus is still that doctor in Black Street Brotherhood. I want all resources to be tilted towards that. Don't look down on Lance. After all, he came from here, and he knows our tactics very well.

"Investigate the whereabouts of all the Black Street higher-ups, especially the three main Assassins—Black Sword, Prison Sickle, and Reversed Machete. It's too difficult to find them, but we must at least make sure that they're not nearby! I'm sure Black Sword is not stupid enough to shelter a wizard. And, even if all goes well, don't let your guard down. After all, we have not waged war with any wizards for over a hundred years. Records and handbooks can only be used as references in the end."

A long moment passed.

"Okay then." After a moment, the young voice said noncommittally, "Speaking of which, are we really not sparing his life? After all, it is a living and breathing wizard!"

In the darkness, the sound of a person sitting up from a chair rang.

"There's no need." The raspy old voice appeared after it. "They are something that had already vanished long ago. Let it be completely buried, along with the Battle of Eradication."

Chapter 39

Battle of Eradication (Two)

'Battle of Eradication. Such familiar words.'

Thales had watched a number of plays in Dark Night Temple beside the Grand Bazaar, even though his concentration was mostly focused on how to steal money from the pockets of the entranced audiences.

Undeniably, all the priests in Dark Night Temple looked neurotic—they wrapped themselves up to the point that not a single bit of wind would enter through their clothing and touch their skin, and chanted crazy words such as "the Lord will return", "the world will inevitably collapse for the second time" and "histories are all lies, the only one who saved the world was the True God of Dark Night" every day. ("Fortunately, they didn't chant something like 'the long night is approaching, evil is everywhere'...Eh, Ryan, pay some attention. That wealthy person is about to turn away!"—The child beggar, Thales, who had been watching the play)

However, for Thales, who was illiterate after transmigrating, the plays they staged were definitely a good, gratuitous way to understand the world

'Erm, perhaps it's not such a good way,' Thales, who had been walking behind Gilbert, thought of a play called 'The True God of Dark Night Descended upon the World and Personally Rescued Thirty-Three Princesses' and could not help but pout.

Among the various plays, which ranged from those that were absolutely absurd, to those that served as a warning to humans, Thales remembered one called 'The Day Calamity Fell, The Hour the World was Eradicated' especially well.

That was about the Battle of Eradication.

Even now, Thales still remembered that amidst the backdrop, which had black and red as its main colors, a masked man in black held chains with a sickle and circled the entire stage with heavy footsteps. The background tune often became gloomy and scary at this moment, frequently making the curious children below the stage who were watching cry.

At the positions where the man in black walked by, actors wearing headgears of various colors to symbolize places around the world wailed and cried, falling down one by one on the stage.

He still remembered the frightening words spoken by the narrator, who sounded like a cawing crow.

"Calamity is coming! Calamity is coming! It will not let go of anyone, will not let go of this world, until every single person is seized by calamity!

"Wake up, my friends, wake up, wake up! Calamity will engulf everything, hell's river will overflow into the world and heaven will collapse onto the earth. The world is on the brink of eradication!

"The Gods will always be with us, and the demons are also beside us. The emperor stands behind us, and the warriors are before us! We can only survive through fighting bravely, and only Dark Night is eternal!

"My friends, calamity is coming! Dark Night has said that the boatman at hell's river does not have a detestable face, neither is he an inhuman, evil fruit, or a demonic flower, but he can corrode a person's heart! We must be willing to wield our swords and return home in glory with our heroes so that we will not become the slaves and underlings of this calamity!

"This is the last battle. Make no distinctions between ourselves, make no distinctions between the sacred and the mortals! The Battle of Eradication! With Dark Night enveloping the world, calamity will definitely disappear!"

In Thales' indistinct memory, in that crazy play, the character who held the chains with a sickle, who was the so-called 'calamity', slaughtered countless living beings until it was defeated by the union of the entire world.

However, until the end, none of the priests and actors of Dark Night Temple explained what 'calamity' truly was. When children on the streets questioned them, the priests would make them utter, "Dark Night shall return, and I am willing to serve". The priests would then give them a piece of barley sugar candy and say with a smile that "calamity is the world's enemy."

Thales, who was deep in thought, did not notice that Gilbert had led him before the second-floor stairs.

The three giant portraits of Constellation's kings which he saw when he first arrived hung neatly on the wall.

"Lusark Kolven is a famous portrait artist in the era of Mindis the Third. His portraits strive to portray the spirit and vitality of each person as best as possible by combining history, environment, and movements."

Gilbert stood still below the portraits of the three late kings of Constellation and spoke with an engrossed tone. "'The Three Constellation Kings'. Just as His Majesty explained to you before, these are the very few kings and sovereigns among the masterpieces Kolven left behind."

'A master's work?' Upon hearing this, Thales raised his head and carefully looked at the middle portrait on the wall—the young knight with his seven-pointed-star insignia, held a spear while riding a horse. Judging from his posture, he was probably charging forward.

The last time Thales saw the portrait, it was only a quick, rushed glance. He had the time to observe it carefully today. He noticed that the long spear, held by the young knight with a valiant and heroic bearing, had a chipped blade. His royal crown was also damaged and mottled. His armor was covered in splashes of blood, and his horse looked fatigued. All the knights behind him were injured; some held up their shields and charged forward, some were covered in blood, some of their armors were torn, some of them held each other by the arm while on their horses, some only had one arm left.

The area in the distance under the setting sun was littered with dead bodies and weapons. There were very few people left standing, serving as lonely decorations for the devastating battlefield. Blood and darkness were the other colors that dominated the color scheme.

Apart from the young knight with a seven-pointed-star on his crown, who looked like he was letting out a frenzied roar, the six people behind him had desolate and sorrowful expressions. However, their faces still showed no hesitation in charging forward. They moved forward behind Tormond the First, who was holding up his spear and roaring fiercely.

Having seen this, Thales' heart stirred. He suddenly remembered what Kessel the Fifth said. "This is Tormond the First, the last prince of the final Empire, and the founder of

Constellation. Known as the 'King of Renaissance', his bravery in the Battle of Eradication is still being eulogized even now."

"He is—" Thales' expression changed slightly. He looked at Gilbert, who was beside him.

"Yes. The 'King of Renaissance', Tormond Jadestar." Gilbert answered with a profound expression. "After the Battle of Eradication over six hundred years ago, among the surviving empire commanders in the Western Battlefield, he held the highest status and position. He is also your ancestor, the man who founded Constellation after the battle."

'Western Battlefield, surviving, empire commanders, highest status, and position.'

Thales immediately caught the keywords.

"Empire commanders? Which empire? What was his status? Apart from the Western Battlefield, were there other battlefields? Who were Tormond's enemies?"

Gilbert was used to Thales' learning style (cutting Gilbert off at any time and raising questions, or even refutations). He smiled without taking any offense and said, "It was, of course, the one and only empire, 'the Empire'.

"The only empire?"

"Yes." Gilbert inhaled and flashed a nostalgic smile. "Did you know, young Sir Thales, that the known world used to be a broad piece of land shaped like an arm? And our kingdom, Constellation's original land was at the position of the wrist.

Thales raised his head abruptly. "What?" He cut Gilbert off in shock. "A piece... an entire piece of land? What about the Eastern and Western Peninsulas which are separated by the Sea of Eradication—"

However, Gilbert only smiled and raised a hand, gesturing for him to be quiet in front of the late king's portrait.

"Listen to me until I finish speaking. The answer lies in the Battle of Eradication."

However, Thales had already thought of an answer in his mind, which was not far from the truth.

'Battle of Eradication. Wait, the ocean between the two peninsulas is called the... Sea of Eradication?'

'Two peninsulas?'

Having thought of this, Thales could not help but poke fun at the situation. "Gilbert, erm, are you going to tell me that a strong celestial entity led an army and invaded our world? And then, after a fierce battle, we managed to thwart their efforts? But we accidentally shattered a magical well which exploded and separated the world into two peninsulas?"

Gilbert's smile froze. "What?"

"And then, the one on the west was called Kalimdor—"

"Shh..." Gilbert could not help but smile and cut him off. "My young Sir, you indeed possess the ability to write novels and create stories. If it was not for your identity, perhaps you could become a splendid bard or poet. However, we are having a history lesson right now."

Thales shrugged and stopped speaking. He kept another piece of newfound memory in the deep recesses of his mind. It was still one related to the girl with adolescent delusions.

Gilbert continued watching Thales patiently until he stopped speaking, and became solemn in front of the portrait of Thales' ancestor. He then continued his explanation. "Over 3,000 years ago, after humans realized their superpowers, many supra class and supreme class elites appeared. Their troop's combat power and equipment were also strengthened ceaselessly. Following many years of friction, war, and union, almost 2,200 years ago, humans finally coalesced into one. For several successive years, they were victorious in battles against other races. They became the rulers of the known world in the continent."

Gilbert displayed an expression of reverence and longing. His gaze drifted about as he spoke airily. "They built a gigantic nation with a surface area that extended to the whole ocean and the entire continent, almost penetrating every corner of the known land. Apart from a small number of Far Easterners, almost all humans—the Rudollians, Northlanders, Nedanese, Calunsians, and Crimson Earthlings—were under the nation's protection and rule.

"They did not give their country nor their dynasty any names. The highest ruler regarded himself as 'The Emperor'. The unprecedented country that did not have and did not need a name was known as 'The Empire'."

Thales gasped lightly. He did not feel glory nor pride in his heart, only sadness and sighs.

'War made the state, and the state made war.' He quietly added a sentence in his heart. He learned this during his past life from a great author's book. 'Coalescence and war. These words can be spoken easily. To forge an unprecedented, gigantic nation, how many battles were needed? How much blood was shed and how many massacres were involved?'

However, Gilbert's expression immediately became gloomy. "Just when the Empire had ruled for almost a thousand years, a new race, so strong they were almost terrifying, quietly emerged among the humans.

"They are immortal and cannot be destroyed, with unparalleled strength and unmatched power. The strongest among the supreme class were powerless to stand up against them, and even true Gods and demons were no match for them. To make it even scarier, they have different thought processes and rules of conduct compared to other humans, or even other races. They are impervious to reason, stubborn, insane, and hard to communicate with."

Thales froze slightly.

It was as though the crazy figure in blue robes with brown hair appeared before him again, mouth opening and closing. "The new-born Mystic made a foothold high above the Gods and watched over the other living things..."

Thales recovered his attention. He saw Gilbert heave a sigh.

"They are like calamity. Since they arrived in the world, they continuously brought about chaos and disasters, blood and massacre. Having dealt with these huge blows, the once great empire slowly declined and, in the end, perished."

'A new race? Emerged among humans? Impervious to reason? Calamity?'

Thales recalled something and his heart began beating erratically.

"During Tormond the First's era, which was the century the Empire Calendar was superseded by the Calendar of Eradication, the Empire had already perished for over three hundred years. The world where the humans and other races lived had gone back into a state of chaos and dissension.

"'The Final Empire' where Tormond lived in was only a nation built by refugees of the former nation, one which took on the name of the Empire. In terms of structure, territory and its people, it was a completely different nation. Customarily, the historians label the previous great Empire as 'the Ancient Empire' and the latter, weak Empire as 'the Final Empire'.

"In the year 1509 of the Empire Calendar, which was the year the Battle of Eradication occurred, the Final Empire was only a nation of average strength in the world. Instead of bringing them pride and legacy, the spiritual heritage and the name of the Ancient Empire became a source of burden and hatred. They became the target of ambitious, past territories—eager creatures from other races, and a plethora of greedy nations.

"Although the Final Empire inherited the Ancient Empire's glory, they made enemies everywhere and was constantly engaged in battle. Moreover, their taxes were high and internal disorder occurred for years on end. The imperial family was incompetent and governance was weak. It seemed that the glory of the Empire was about to end in the year 1509 of the Empire Calendar.

"However, on that same year, that race, along with those calamities, had bewitched a considerable amount of people around the world into becoming their believers and followers. With an unprecedented strength, they formally declared war on the all civilizations in the world."

Thales was slightly stunned. With his clear grasp of logical reasoning, he had already caught a few illogical points within the narration. However, he did not immediately point them out, and instead restrained himself.

'What exactly are the calamities? What does emerging among humans mean? Since they had such great strength, why didn't they continue working towards dominating the entire continent after they destroyed the Ancient Empire, but instead waited until the Final Empire emerged before they formally declared war?

'If they are completely impervious to reason, why did they want to recruit followers and believers like a true God?

'If their thought processes are completely different to humans, why did they want to declare war? To conquer the world? Is this a joke?

'This is basically a story full of loopholes!'

However, Thales was aware that this was not because Gilbert deliberately misled him, but because right now, there was a lot of information that Thales could not understand at all.

Just like those secrets about the Bloody Year from before.

"Those calamities," Thales gulped and asked with slight anxiety, "what are they?"

Gilbert did not find Thales' question strange. However, he did not notice that Thales' tone was less confident and steady compared to usual.

He heaved a sigh. "After the Battle of Eradication, all information and sources related to the 'calamities' were sealed and banned. This is an unspoken agreement between the Gods, demons, and humans; and also a countermeasure to prevent their numbers from increasing.

"As the years went by, the horrors of the calamities slowly faded away. The names and existences of the people who were regarded as calamities were also slowly forgotten by many people.

"However, as the king's only heir, you will have to know about all of this sooner or later."

Gilbert inhaled deeply and spoke with a severe countenance. "All those calamities were either once humans, or a member of other intelligent races. However, desire, greed, and ambition drove them to become a foreign species who had lost their innate character. Even though they are no different from us most of the time and might even be hiding among us, they are truly an entirely foreign species. According to folklore and most people, these calamities had a common name."

Gilbert cleared his throat and enunciated each syllable clearly and slowly with a severe countenance. "Mystics."

At that moment, Thales had to use all his willpower and mind to suppress his body from trembling too much.

"In their eyes, Mystics are only another category of Psionics who are seemingly equal to strong warriors like the Knights of Eradication and Psionic Warriors."

With a freezing gaze, Gilbert continued speaking, "However, only the countries and temples that participated in the Battle of Eradication know that these so-called Mystics are actually the fearsome 'calamities' that were a curse to history for thousands of years, had spilled plenty of blood on their hands, had eradicated both dynasties of The Empire, and almost destroyed the whole world.

"They will only notice that something is wrong and get a hint of the person's identity when they try to kill a Mystic. At that time, it would often be too late... because these calamities known as Mystics are immortal and indestructible."

"Young Sir," Gilbert said sternly. "In the future, if you are unfortunate enough to encounter a Mystic, you must first protect yourself. When you are safe, try to seek help... We have a method designed based on the weaknesses of Mystics that can be used to fight them."

Thales kept a straight face as he touched the wound on his left hand, but his teeth chattered slightly. Unfortunately, he had already encountered these 'calamities'.

Even though Thales' heart was filled with questions, for his own safety, he could not question Gilbert too eagerly. Who knew what he might reveal in his anxiety?

'However, this is still not right... If Mystics are such a fearsome existence, why do they have to go around contending for small gangs? Why does Constellation let their Blood Bottle Gang flourish in the kingdom?

'Another questionable point. So many questionable points.'

Gilbert paused for a moment, as though wondering why Thales did not speak nor ask any questions. However, he did not suspect much. Instead, he shut his eyes and contemplated about something, only softly speaking after a few minutes.

"There is no need to doubt their dreadfulness. These calamities are truly too strong. Over six hundred years ago, under the leadership of strong warriors, our most powerful and bravest army fought their underlings in a bloody and frenzied battle. After breaking through their outer defense line, the most skilled knights and warriors besieged those calamities, but were killed en masse in battle."

Thales thought of the play in Dark Night Temple. On stage, along the path 'calamity' walked by, the actors fell one by one.

"The Gods descended one by one upon the world and then perished. The demons rose on earth and were then destroyed. Warriors of various races went to the battlefield and were then sacrificed.

"The battle continued for many years. After paying a devastating price, we finally discovered their weaknesses and finally defeated those calamities."

Thales clenched his fist tightly. It was as though Asda's desolate words rang beside his ears, "We lost."

Gilbert's words interrupted his flashback about Asda.

"However, the strength of those accursed calamities was too outrageously frightening. In the final, decisive pursuit that surpassed the abilities of those in supreme class, those accursed calamities, those mongrels that could almost destroy the world..."

Thales, who had been carefully observing the charging Tormond, shuddered. He suddenly knew what came next in the story.

Gilbert calmly uttered the next sentence. "They sank the weakest peninsula in the center of the large continent, which connected all the peninsulas in all other directions. All the living beings and materials there were completely annihilated.

"After the peninsula sank, the residue of that power spread out, causing the entire continent to be pushed apart from each other in two different directions. Within five short years, the depths of the ocean that was formed could no longer be seen, and it tore apart the land that we knew into the Eastern and Western Peninsulas, along with a countless number of islands.

"This is the famous 'Great Crack and Sink' that happened six hundred something years ago.

"The Battle of Eradication ended like that."

Gilbert emitted a long sigh, and what he said next made Thales momentarily dazed.

"That sunken peninsula contained the entire territory of the Final Empire. And the

Final Empire...

"...was put to an end."

Chapter 40

The Empire Shall Last, So Long as the Stars Do

"The Empire sank, the skies fell and the earth cracked.

"The Capital of Triumph, the Empire's capital city, which had over two thousand and three thousand years of history since the era of the feudal kings, and had witnessed the rise and fall of both dynasties of the Empire, was completely buried at the bottom of the Sea of Eradication along with the perishing of the Final Empire."

Gilbert's compassionate words even affected the guards standing on both sides of the hall. Thales could feel that their hands, which were pressed on their sword hilts, were trembling slightly.

Gilbert pressed on Thales' shoulders and looked at the young knight on the wall, who was perpetually roaring while charging forward, but seemed like he could never reach the end. "As for Tormond the First, at that time, he was not yet a king; he was one of the surviving citizens of the Final Empire."

Thales could feel the powerful grip from Gilbert's hand. The former Foreign Affairs Minister quietly opened his mouth and recited a few lines from 'Cahill's Falling Leaves Poetry Collection'.

"The hero raised his flag, the king lifted his spear. The empire has fallen, the world has darkened. The living were frightened, lonely and homeless."

"After ten years of blood and fire in war, the soldiers returned with shouts of victory but were no longer able to return to their previous lives. In their homeland to which they fought ceaselessly for, no blood remained in their noble families, all of them had lost their lives."

Upon saying this, Gilbert spoke in a trance.

"Thales, my young sir, can you imagine that feeling?"

Thales stared blankly at Tormond, who was advancing courageously.

'The young knight looked so brave and fearless. Even in the unbearably devastating battlefield, he looked gorgeous and radiant. At that time, did he know that he would never be able to return to his homeland?'

Gilbert did not wait for Thales to reply. He heaved a sigh. "No, at least not for me."

Thales did not speak but had a strange feeling in his heart.

'The living were frightened, lonely and homeless.'

Thales calmly recited the next two lines of the poem.

'The living were frightened.'

In his imagination, a grand and majestic city appeared. However, it was sinking slowly. All the people were running for their lives, shouting in panic and seized by trepidation. However, they could only watch helplessly as the ocean drowned everything.

At this moment, Thales suddenly raised his head and asked with a melancholic and slightly depressed tone tinged with indignation for the suffering the citizens had gone through.

"What about those people?"

"Hmm?" Gilbert, who was immersed in his recollection of the King of Renaissance, turned his head and looked at Thales in puzzlement.

Thales was also looking at Gilbert. He calmed his emotions, and his gaze was placid.

"The members of the royal family, nobles, knights, and soldiers were not the only ones there. They were participants of the battle anyway. There were also countless people who lived on that piece of land. Farmers, merchants, the elderly, and children." The boy spoke with a mild tone, "All the people who, regardless of birth, regardless of status, and regardless of race, were involuntarily dragged into this battle.

"During the battle and when the land sank, they were more innocent than the calamities, the emperor, the nobles or any other person. However, they were The Empire's true purpose of existence. Did none of them manage to escape?"

Gilbert gazed at Thales with slightly narrowed eyes, as if he had just met Thales and

was sizing him up all over again.

"You are just like your grandfather who was sympathetic towards the populace, young Sir Thales." Gilbert heaved a sigh. "You have a sympathetic and kind heart."

'Sympathetic towards the populace? Actually using the word "sympathetic"? Gilbert has probably never placed himself in the same dimension as the "populace".

'As for being sympathetic and kind?' Thales quietly shook his head in his heart.

However, Gilbert immediately lowered his head dejectedly. His eyes were full of grief. "No, all the citizens of the Final Empire in the entire world, from nobles to the commoners, sank into the ocean.

"Only Tormond and his army remained as proof that the Final Empire and the Ancient Empire were not a myth. They truly existed."

Thales lowered his head and shut his eyes, lightly heaving a sigh.

At this moment, Gilbert's hands, which were on Thales' shoulders, exerted force slowly and gradually. He uttered the following words slowly and clearly. "And at that time, Prince Tormond was the most unloved, illegitimate child in the royal family of the Final Empire."

Thales's whole body trembled. He whipped his head back and looked at Gilbert in disbelief. He now knew why Gilbert wanted to tell him all this.

"Forget about titles, territories, and assets. He did not even have the right to inherit his family name. Even the title of 'prince' was only a form of courtesy towards him." Gilbert looked at Thales with a determined gaze.

"Compared to you right now, he had even fewer things he could call his own. The circumstances he faced was a hundred times more perilous than yours."

Thales stared blankly at Gilbert. He then looked at the illegitimate child on the wall, who was also a king.

Gilbert shook his head and removed his hands, which were resting on Thales' shoulders. He then continued to speak. "They won the Battle of Eradication. Humans and the entire civilized world were joyously celebrating the mighty victory. The

world's political climate was also constantly changing.

"In the east, Senjem, the King of Mountains, carried the hopes of the Far Easterners and established the Mane et Nox Dynasty, after overthrowing the previous dynasty.

"Amma Mimeux Hanbol raised a flag and began spreading Hanbol dynasty's great reputation among countless believers.

"In the west, the hero Raikaru Eckstedt was crowned as king amidst cheers from the crowd. The strong and prideful Eckstedt Kingdom was thence born.

"However, compared to this..." Gilbert looked at Master Kolven's artwork solemnly and compassionately. "The Final Empire, which inherited the glory of the Empire, lost all its land and people overnight. Only the last of her kin remained.

"Overnight, the originally insignificant illegitimate child became the only remaining supreme leader—of the Empire that ceased to exist.

"Tormond had no land, people, provisions, nor riches. Apart from the six knights with him, he had an army of only two thousand. They advanced into foreign lands with trepidation, severed hopes, and a dim future ahead of them.

"Tormond, who was 24 years old, moved between various forces of powers and feudal lords. He used all possible methods to obtain even the slightest bit of fodder, the tiniest amount of provisions, encampment, or even a batch of weapons—from groveling and begging to arguing strongly on the basis of reason, from pleasing words and flattery to swindling and robbing. He ensured his subordinates' independent survival and protected the Empire's last remaining dignity.

"Every day, the lonely Prince Tormond struggled in battles, conspiracies, ambitious dreams, and authority, trying hard to survive amidst other people sneering at him, jeering at him, using him, and harboring ill-will against him. When he was only 26, he had a head full of white hair."

Gilbert put his hands behind his back. His eyes were filled with reverence. "'The Final Prince of the Final Empire'." This was how the people in both peninsulas ridiculed and mocked him."

Thales gazed fixedly at the bright and valiant prince without saying anything.

"Ten years went by. The group's headcount became smaller and smaller, along with their hopes. Finally, after a battle laden with casualties and deaths, his despairing subordinates held their comrades' dead bodies and surrounded the haggard Prince Tormond. They questioned him, crying. 'What is the purpose of continuing this fight? The Empire has perished without a single inch of its territory left. We are like trees without roots, the ashes of history, and will finally wither away without a trace. Why battle still?! Why don't we just give up now?'"

Thales trembled slightly and looked towards the prince. The ancestor's gaze had become different.

'When you have nothing, and everything has perished, what are you fighting for?'

Gilbert looked at Thales' expression and sighed compassionately. But he immediately put on a determined gaze and expression.

"Thales!" For the first time, Gilbert addressed Thales sternly and without honorifics. "You must carefully listen to my next words.

"That night, while being called into account by his subordinates and while shedding tears, Tormond took off his worn armor and uttered the most important vow in his life while pointing at the countless stars in the sky!"

At that moment, Thales saw that the guards were standing straight on both sides of the hall in a respectful manner. They had their heads lifted high and their chests puffed out. The sounds of armor clashing against each other instantly rose in the spacious hall.

With a stalwart expression on his face, Gilbert spoke with a solemn and respectful voice, "The Empire shall last, so long as the stars do."

Thales sucked in a deep breath.

'The Empire... The Empire shall last? So long as the stars do?' Thales thought about the meaning of these words.

Just as the middle-aged noble had finished speaking, all the soldiers and guards in the hall began walking slowly and with great force. The sounds of their footsteps echoed in the air.

Thud!

Immediately afterward, they placed their fists in position and struck the golden silver shield with the nine-pointed star!

Bang!

The spacious hall was instantly filled with a clear echo!

Thales, who was stunned by the history and was still in a daze, was terrified to the point that he took a step backward.

"Thales!"

Before he could react to the situation, Gilbert suddenly crouched down and held the boy's shoulders. Then, once Gilbert looked into Thales' eyes at his eye level, he spoke seriously.

"Please do not underestimate yourself, your blood, and the meaning behind your status and your blood.

"Your existence as well as the Jadestar Family's existence, symbolize humanity's golden age. It is the strongest proof that the great Ancient Empire, the heroic Final Empire still continues to exist in the world!"

At that moment, Gilbert's eyes were filled with excitement. His hands trembled violently for some unknown reason, causing Thales to be anxious.

Gilbert continued speaking loudly, "September 27th, Year 10 in the Calendar of Eradication—that is the date Constellation was built.

"Prince Tormond pointed at the stars and pledged his oath that he would change his family name to 'Jadestar' and become Constellation's Founding King, Tormond the First.

"After several decades, Constellation became the most powerful country in the Western Peninsula! It was known as 'Western Peninsula's Blade and Shield' along with Eckstedt.

"The Empire was reborn from ashes. With Constellation as its name, it emerged once

again in the world! Its splendor continued once again, and its greatness was revived!

"When people spoke about Tormond Jadestar, no one remembered the former 'Final Prince'.

"They only knew him as the 'King of Renaissance'."

Gilbert's mustache twitched, and his eyes shone so brilliantly that it looked as if there was a fire burning in his eyes. "The Jadestar Family's motto was born because of that as well!"

Thales felt a little ill at ease, even though he was also deeply moved by Tormond's story.

However, when he looked at the zealous Gilbert before him, Thales still found it difficult for him to fuse with these emotions.

'Does Constellation exist only for the Empire that only existed in the past?

'There's something off about this attitude to form a kingdom.

'There's definitely something off.'

A feeling of discord and discomfort attacked Thales' heart. However, when he saw Gilbert's eyes burning brightly in expectation and heard the sounds of breathing from the guards that had clearly become much heavier, he could only grit his teeth and nod deeply.

Thales frowned and repeated that sentence after them.

"The Empire shall last... so long... as the stars remain."

At that moment, a lovely yet reprimanding voice filled with anger traveled into the hall!

"Enough!"

Thales and Gilbert turned their heads at the same time, and Jines Bajkovic looked at the teacher-student pair with a displeased expression on her chilly face.

"It is dinner time," she said coldly.

Chapter 41

Midier Jadestar

That night, under Jines' piercing stare and merciless reproach, Thales finished his dinner (which had quite a lot of rules, and was also a boring but unavoidable etiquette class) with difficulty. After all, etiquette served as a code of conduct and was one of the criteria for the division of social strata. At least, with trembling hands, he was now able to use the table-knife and fork according to the rules.

However, Thales could feel the fury and dissatisfaction hidden behind Jines' beautiful eyes. He vaguely knew that this was related to the history of Constellation Gilbert was talking about in the afternoon.

'The Empire shall last, so long as the stars remain.'

This vow carried a huge and heavy weight. Even for someone like Thales, who did not know about the legend of how Tormond the First built the country very well, his heart could not help but begin to race and his blood boil.

Gilbert and the entire hall of guards (Thales only knew later that they were all the descendants of the Final Empire's last remaining army troop) embodied that spirit in those words. However, Thales, with sharp perception, noticed Jines' abhorrence towards this sentence, and even the meaning behind the sentence.

But he did not dare to ask.

He did not know what the attitude of this female official (who claimed herself to be his father's lover) towards him was.

From Jines' gazes towards him, Thales had seen flashes of hatred. He had also seen her forced forbearance, and her hesitation when going near him. The only thing he had not seen was a sincere smile from her. Therefore, the entire etiquette class was abnormally dreary.

That was until, out of Thales' expectations, Jines, with brightly burning eyes, broke the silence first. "You don't like these rules and etiquette, do you?" Looking at Thales who

was bending his wrist with great strength so that he would not exceed the standard movement allowed for the arm when eating, Jines suddenly spoke coldly, "Your facial expression is practically uglier than a horse who just had a bridle put on it."

Thales was shocked by the sudden question. In a flurry, he tried to answer in suitable terms. "Erm, Madam Jines, I know that all these are a must, and I am still trying my best to adapt—"

However, he was cut off by Jines again.

"Of course you must learn these sets of etiquette," she spoke coldly, but her tone was filled with disdain, which made her sound as if she was mocking him, "But you had better not become their captive... To walk, sit and lie down in a so-called dignified manner does not mean that you are truly very dignified. Similarly, having that glorious and prideful history behind you does not mean that you are truly..."

Jines did not continue speaking. She instinctively stopped herself from saying the rest of the sentence.

A surge of coldness passed through Thales' heart.

It seemed that this lady held something against Gilbert's teaching method.

"Madam Jines," he probed carefully, "Gilbert's history lesson this afternoon... you... you looked like you didn't... didn't..."

"Hmph, what a joke. That there was a mighty and age-old kingdom... Why would I dare to have any complaints?" Jines sneered and denied Thales' words. However, the latter could obviously read the sarcasm and derision in the female official's eyes. Thales stared fixedly at Jines, at his father's lover.

"Madam Jines," Thales asked carefully and softly. "You were not my father's female official from the start, were you?"

Jines raised her brow. Her lips trembled slightly, causing the beauty mole beside her lips to quiver as well.

"And you... don't like these sets of etiquette and rules either, and even dislike—" Thales hesitated for a while, but looking at the fork and spoon in his hands, he still asked, "Dislike this kingdom?"

After Thales finished speaking...

Jines looked at Thales with a dumbfounded expression.

'This child... He is really sensitive.'

Jines turned her head around and looked at the golden silver nine-pointed star symbol on top of the fireplace in the study room. She did not speak for a long time.

Just as Thales stuck out his tongue, thinking that he had said something wrong and was preparing to lower his head as if nothing happened and continue battling with his knife and spoon, Jines heaved a sigh. She stared at the knife and spoon in Thales' hands, lost in thought, and softly said, "I was born in Bajkovic Town in Seude County. It is a little town by the ocean on the eastern part of the kingdom. Although it is not a prosperous trading harbor, the people there have a self-sufficient economy through fishing. It is considered a nice place in Constellation.

"My father was the mayor and was quite renowned among the eastern counties. All along, he strictly raised us to obey the rules, conform to etiquette and become ladies. He hoped that one day, our family could also become a noble family with a long legacy."

Thales' gaze sharpened. While Jines was not paying attention, he discreetly flexed his already stiff wrist.

"However, I was a stubborn, rebellious daughter. I hated these rules and etiquette since young. Which was why even when I was sixteen and almost an adult, I was still a wild girl who did not even know the social dances used in court, I ate crudely and spoke wantonly." Under the lamp, Jines smiled bitterly while looking at the moon outside the window. However, her tone was full of nostalgia.

"Of course, my father would not let me fool around. In short, those memories are not very pleasant. Things had sort of reached a stalemate. My family wanted to strip away my status and right of inheritance, and send me to the temple to become a priestess."

Thales stuck his tongue out where Jines could not see it. He knew that priests in temples usually vow to never get married and serve the Gods all their lives.

'For things to reach this extent, it was probably more than "sort of reached a stalemate."'

Jines lowered her head slightly, and her gaze dimmed, but she then immediately raised her head and flashed a cheerful smile. "However, at that time, a prince became a guest at our palace."

'What?' Upon hearing this, Thales, who had been exercising his wrist stopped. 'Prince? It wouldn't go like one of those soap opera plots I'm thinking about, right?'

Jines continued speaking, "He heard my story, but only laughed out loud. He pardoned my crime in public and promised me that I don't have to abide by the rules and etiquette that normal noble girls have to. However, the condition was that after I reached adulthood, I must be able to find a way to make a living independent of my status as a noble's daughter."

'This... is indeed very much like a soap opera.' However, there was slight uncertainty in Thales' heart. 'Weren't the prince's actions and views, a little, how do I put it, erm, too advanced and modern?'

However, Jines looked as if she was talking to herself. The corner of her lips curled up slightly by itself. She did not notice Thales' reaction at all.

"Then, I left my family castle and followed the prince to the capital city. From reading the court newspaper to the prince daily to having the difficult task of being a bookkeeper, a scribe who gets paid a copper per page, and a police station secretary, to a Class Five Police Officer... my life completely changed because of him."

Thales was stunned for a while. Based on his impression, Jines was a standard court noble. He never thought that she had such a rich and colorful past.

"However, after moving from profession to profession for years, I still became a female official in the end." Jines self-deprecatingly shook her head.

"Look at me, I'm a disgrace among nobles who hates rules and decorum. However, I'm here now, teaching the kingdom's heir... teaching him the customs I used to loathe the most."

Once she finished talking, Jines returned her gaze to the dining table and stared at Thales—his table knife fell again.

Thales laughed awkwardly. He then asked a question which even he felt that it sounded like it was from a soap opera. "That kind-hearted prince. Was he Ke... was he

my father?"

'Your father?' Jines' gaze became a little hazy in an instant.

However, Thales did not get his expected answer.

The female official turned her head over slowly. There was an abstract expression on her face, one that was complicated and difficult to decipher.

"No, it's not him." Jines spoke softly, "Even now, I still remember the type of smile on that prince's face as he pardoned me—a dirty, whiny girl with shackles on her wrist.

"That warm, tolerant and sunny smile. It was as though he was relishing in all of the world's beauty. No manner of ugly or dirty things could make him change his expression.

"As for your father Kessel, at that time, he was still a pompous prince who was famous for being wild and unbridled. The only thing on his face was a devilish grin that made ladies become seized by fear and trepidation. He didn't have this type of reassuring smile."

Thales looked at Jines in shock.

'King Kessel... wild, unbridled; a pompous prince?'

He saw that Jines' gaze was shining, as if harboring countless emotions and sentiments. She then slowly uttered each of the following words. "That day, the one who came to our palace was the late king's eldest son.

"His Majesty Kessel's eldest brother, Midier Jadestar, the former crown prince."

.....

Duke Zayen frowned and put down a letter that had a symbol of black fangs as a seal. "And so, the three supposed elites that we thought were honoring the Corleone family's agreement to provide help were merely the losers of their clan's internal struggle." He crossed his hands below the Tricolor Iris Flowers.

"Under the guise of the Corleone Family name, they used our invitation card, borrowed our voyage ship, relied on our passports and used us—the Covendier

Family—like idiots. They then sailed across the Ocean of Eradication, escaped the Hill of Pain, and went into hiding in Eternal Star City. They stayed for a long time in our manor, and took away a considerable amount of blood...”

"Is that so?"

The two supreme class knights who stood before his study table, Lord Cassain and Lord Seychelles, did not speak. They just looked at the sweat-drenched, bald, middle-aged man who kneeled on the floor between them with a complicated expression.

Cassain remembered that the bald, middle-aged man came under the old Duke's command at the same time as he did, and was a Tower of Eradication batch mate who served under the Covendier's Tricolor Iris Flowers.

Unfortunately, the middle-aged man lacked skill and was heavily injured in a battle. Ever since then, he could only deal with civil duties. Even so, the old Duke still pitied his circumstances and with trust, assigned him to handle all affairs related to crossing the ocean.

'What was his name again?' Cassain searched through his memory with effort, but could not recall it no matter what.

"Yes... it is so... they showed the Sacred Blood Signet that only Blood Clansmen in the direct line of descent of the Corleone family have. That blond-haired one also threatened us with a terrible attitude..." The head of the kneeling middle-aged man almost touched the floor. He explained, stuttering, "They also had your... your handwritten letter..."

"Enough." Duke Zayen heaved a sigh and massaged the area between his eyebrows. The butler, Ashford, who was beside him, immediately grasped the situation and poured him a glass of handmade grape wine, which had been made in the Sera Dukedom.

With effort, Zayen smiled in resignation. "You are not at fault in this matter. You can go now. Remember to be more careful next time."

As though granted an amnesty, the middle-aged bald man kept nodding his head in apology. Only after being urged by Seychelles did he leave the room, trembling.

"He used to be a talented person, but he is useless now," Zayen said with a face filled

with lament and raised his wine glass. "Send him immediately to the Eastern Peninsula again, and get rid of him in the international waters. Don't do it within the nation's border or territorial waters. I don't want to be charged with murder."

Upon hearing this, a thought appeared in Cassain's heart.

"My esteemed Duke," he could not help but speak, "if you let him stay, he would presumably become even more dedicated..."

Cassain did not notice Seychelles signaling beside him.

"I can forget about it if it was a normal affair. However, for this type of crucial secret, I do not want there to be careless mistakes." Zayen sighed and said, "He already made a mistake, and he will definitely harbor grudges and become gloomy. His doubts towards his future will only increase as time goes by."

"And he knows about our contact with the Corleones. This is related to that plan. And both of you know how important that plan is."

Cassain finally noticed Seychelles' signal. He lowered his head and did not speak anymore.

"For the next voyage, get someone new." Zayen tasted a mouthful of wine with disappointment. "When father was still around, they were much less undisciplined when it came to work."

Ashford calmly replied, "It takes time for loyalty and prudence to be formed."

Zayen shook his head and sighed. "Unfortunately, what we lack the most right now is time. That thing will be happening in a month, and our people cannot be a part of it. There had better not be any accidents."

Seychelles nodded slightly. "Sir, please rest assured that for those mercenaries we paid such a high price to hire, even if they were asked to assassinate the king, there is enough chance that they would succeed."

Lord Cassain trembled slightly, he did not know why his colleague was so daring in his speech.

Zayen paused for a moment. He only looked at Seychelles after a while.

"Do not speak carelessly," the young Duke said coldly.

Seychelles lowered his head and apologized. However, he was laughing coldly in his heart. 'It doesn't seem like the duke is displeased.'

"You people should be departing. Both the Cullen and the Nanchester family will be sending people over. Be careful about this, do not begin any conflicts with them."

Zayen's gaze was ice-cold. He carefully said to Cassain and Seychelles, "When those mercenaries succeed, both of you get rid of them."

Cassain trembled violently. He raised his head in disbelief. "Sir! Get rid of them? Aren't we using someone else's name to hire the mercenaries? Some- some of them are from the Tower of Eradication and are my—"

Zayen suddenly looked towards him, his gaze was as sharp as swords.

Cassain's throat trembled. The supreme class knight could not finish his words.

"Then, advise your friend to go home," Zayen said calmly. However, Ashford knew that this was how he showed his dissatisfaction. "And switch someone who is not your friend over."

Seychelles pulled hard on the back of Cassain's clothes, stopping the latter from speaking.

"As you wish, sir." The clever Seychelles nodded and dragged the pale-faced Cassain away.

Zayen slowly heaved a sigh to calm his mood down. He looked at the old duke's portrait some distance away.

"Cassain is already old," he said plainly. "After this matter is over, send him back either to Jade City, or his own territory."

Ashford's countenance was calm. He nodded slightly.

"As for the issue related to those Corleone refugees, Ashford, handle it personally. Start the investigation from those cavaliers who suddenly broke into Vine Manor that night." Zayen spilled the red wine from the bottom of his glass onto the floor. His gaze

was ice-cold. "Contact the Corleone Family. Write a letter directly to the Night Queen. Tell Katerina what happened over here, and take the opportunity to increase our bargaining power."

Ashford nodded his head. "As you wish, Sir."

"I remember that Mindis Hall's investigation was assigned to Blood Bottle Gang. Is Nikolay not found yet?" Zayen narrowed his eyes and looked at Ashford.

"No, sir." Ashford bowed slightly. "Blood Bottle Gang is like a host of dragons without a head now. There are rumors that he went overseas in search of the Blood Mystic."

'The Blood Mystic?' Zayen shut his eyes tight and exhaled.

All the education he had ever received compelled him to use his entire body's strength to swallow the entirely crude words that he really wanted to say.

"There is no other way then. Dispatch our people to directly control Blood Bottle Gang." Duke Zayen opened his eyes. There were no emotions at all in his pupils. He put down his wine glass and said, "Within these two months, I want to take control of all the rumors and information in Blood Bottle Gang's territory, from civilians to soldiers, and from nobles to traders."

Ashford nodded lightly.

"The messenger dispatched to Eckstedt should be on his way back. Let's see whether the Archduke of Black Sand is willing to seize this opportunity." Zayen leaned back on his comfortable couch and narrowed his eyes.

'Wait for it, father. Tricolor Iris Flowers will very soon take a step forward...

'...If all goes well.'

Chapter 42

Thales' Secret

The weather turned cold for the capital during the next twenty days. Winter had arrived.

Under Jines' fierce tutelage, at the price of him spending two something hours each session during every morning and evening, under the definite condition of him ending the day dead tired and aching all over his body, he learned all three defensive styles, seven offensive styles, and one combination style of the ancient Northland Military Sword Style. When his arms began getting used to the shape and weight of the shield and sword, he finally got himself a larger sword and shield. Based on Jines' words, he had begun progressing from "passively getting trounced" to "learning how to be beaten up" (was what Jines said).

"Last time, you were the one getting beaten up. Now, you know why you are getting beaten up," said the extremely stern Jines.

"Then I'm still getting beaten up- Ack, ma'am! You haven't given the 'go' to start yet- Ouch!" From the flailing Thales.

Under Gilbert's strict tutelage, Thales also learned how to basically use the advanced grammatical structure for the lingua franca, and the national language for the Ancient Empire through his cultural lessons every afternoon and night. He started coming into contact with the manner of speech used by Constellation's nobles, and some necessary cultural words from foreign languages, such as the proverbs from the countries in the Far East and the words of warning from the elves. Through Gilbert's history lessons—which he would teach with tireless zeal—Thales also learned some basic knowledge about Errol.

"A noble who does not know how to use the Ancient Empire's alphabet and its ancient grammar to form his manner of speech is not a qualified noble in Constellation. However, Sir Thales, I believe that you will need some time to become familiar with the complex and ever-changing Ancient Empire alphabet..."

In the next second, Gilbert saw Thales casually writing the complete set of letters from

the Ancient Empire's alphabet, and he emitted a sigh in an incredibly sulky manner and threw his pride as a teacher into the Sea of Eradication.

"...Urk. Fine. Let us go to the next chapter: the Ancient Empire's basic manner of speech."

Besides the pony that loved throwing him off its back as well as the very, very strange and bizarre etiquette for nobles, there was really nothing that did not go smoothly for him in Thales' eyes. Even the Blood Clan trio from the Corleone Family and that Archduchess loli did not come and bother him.

Thales nodded in his heart slightly. 'That is why... It's about time that I start investigating the mysteries of myself.'

On an afternoon that was a little warmer, Gilbert, who had been holding on to a staff in one hand and held a book in the other, saw Thales standing on a chair in the study while searching for something on the stately bookshelf. He could not help but ask curiously, "What are you looking for, my young Sir Thales?"

"Ah, Gilbert. Wait for a moment... Based on the sequence in the alphabet, it should be here... Eh? Why is this book so thick?"

Gilbert chuckled softly. He walked towards the shelf and helped Thales extract the thick tome from between two other books, since the boy had just finished practicing the sword that morning and now lacked strength.

"Thank you, Gilbert. Ah, with this, I have the complete set of books." Thales tiredly flung the book on the cedar wood study table, placing it beside the other books on the table.

"This is..." The middle-aged noble walked closer and browsed the titles on the books placed on top of the other books. 'Jadestar Family History', 'Royal Family Register of Constellation', 'Collection of Constellation Laws and the King's Warrants in October 612', 'Collection of Constellation Court Affairs', along with other books including the book Thales had just obtained, 'Chronicles of Constellation's Kings'.

Thales scratched his head and spoke in a slightly awkward manner, "These are books I found which, I think, contain my family's history after I tried searching using the letters and words I learned over the past few weeks. I intend to read through them slowly and examine them once I am able to read more smoothly. After all, as my

father's only son, it wouldn't seem too good if I have absolutely no understanding towards the Jadestar Family, the royal family, and to those related to me by blood."

Gilbert arched his brows slightly, then felt relieved. 'Now that I think about the conversation we had in the secret chamber, I knew I should not have underestimated young Sir Thales' adaptability and precociousness.'

"This thought became especially dominant after I heard you talk about the King of Renaissance, Tormund, and Madam Jines spoke to me about Prince Midier, the eldest son of the previous King who is also my uncle," Thales talked excitedly as he arranged the books on the table. He placed some of the books below the others without batting an eyelid.

The boy continued speaking, "That is why I became even more curious about the Jadestar Family—my family."

Gilbert looked at Thales and smiled before he nodded his head lightly.

He did notice Thales' slightly abnormal breathing rate.

"Your studious behavior and your diligence makes me truly pleased... Did Madam Jines tell you the story about the eldest son of the previous King?"

"Yes, but she didn't say much," Thales replied with a nod. He pushed the pile of books to the side. "The general idea I got was that Midier Jadestar is a good person with a warm smile, and he seemed to be very well-received by the people."

Gilbert's eyes became dark, something that was out of Thales' expectations. He looked as if some sort of memory had been jogged in his head.

"He wasn't just well-received..." But he quickly recovered and nodded as if he was absorbed in his thoughts. "I am afraid you will not be able to find any records about him. After all, he was not a King of Constellation, and it had not been long since he passed away."

A thought appeared in Thales' mind. He flipped open a book with smooth movements and blocked the back of the pile of books placed by his side. With a curious expression, he asked, "If that's the case, then did you know him? Based on your impression, how was my uncle, Prince Midier, as a person?"

Gilbert was taken aback for a moment before he sank into deep thought. He no longer paid any attention to the pile of books beside Thales' hand.

"Prince Midier..." After a few seconds, Gilbert sighed softly. His words were filled with fond remembrance as he spoke, "When the previous king, King Aydi, was sixty years old, Prince Midier had already begun assisting the King in governmental affairs. At that time, no one had any doubt that he would become the next good king after Mindis the Third.

"He had once been the overseer of foreign affairs for a period of time, and I was fortunate enough to work under him.

"At that time, because I did not have good teamwork with my colleagues, I ruined the task to receive Steel City's diplomat group. I used a Crystal Drop wine goblet with the symbol of the Sacred Tree to serve the dwarf prince from the Hall of King's Chronicles.

"At that time, Prince Midier used a joking tone to appease the enraged prince. He said, 'We're using a wine goblet with the Sacred Tree during our banquet in memory of your ancestor, who once forced back the army of Sacred Tree Kingdom.' I could only hide myself in shame.

"Of course, Prince Midier did not punish me afterwards... He was as tolerant and kind as the rumors depict him to be. However, he passed the Crystal Drop wine goblet with the Sacred Tree's symbol personally and said..."

At that part, to Thales' shock, he saw Gilbert using a tone filled with emotion when he repeated the previous prince's words, "'Gil, this Crystal Drop wine goblet has a current value equivalent to the friendship between Renaissance Palace and the Hall of King's Chronicles. This is the debt you owe to the kingdom. When you have performed enough meritorious deeds to pay for this value, then return the goblet to me to clear your debt.'"

Gilbert looked into the distance and did not speak for a long time. Thales was left alone to try his hardest to draw up the image of this uncle of his in his head based on Jines and Gilbert's stories: A prince with great skills in dealing with all kinds of matters, and who had a respectable personality.

After a few minutes, Gilbert continued talking in a soft voice, "The people say that he is a kind man and that he was gentle to others. But to us officials, His Highness's

capabilities and intelligence were not in the slightest bit inferior to his personality.

"It's very difficult to imagine how a person can be kind but awe-inspiring, gentle but decisive at the same time... And yet Prince Midier is this sort of person." Gilbert placed the book in his hand down on the table before placing his hands behind his back. Admiration rose in his eyes. "It might sound exaggerated, but even now, I still think that the citizens in Constellation are not worthy of such a good prince."

Gilbert looked as if he had snapped out of his thoughts, and with brightly burning eyes, he said to Thales, "It's still too early to speak of such things. If it is possible, young Sir Thales, then I wish that you would set Prince Midier as an example. Constellation needs an heir like this."

Gilbert's especially stern and serious gaze caused a light shudder to run through Thales' body.

At that moment, Thales suddenly thought of something.

"Gilbert, just how..." Thales dipped his head down. He hesitated for a moment, but after that, he lifted his head and asked, "Just how did my uncle die? You only mentioned that he wielded a sword and died fighting alongside the guards at the palace gate."

Silence.

"Ha..." Gilbert closed his eyes and sighed heavily before he spoke, "During the Bloody Year, he ordered the guards and soldiers to withdraw and walked into crowd alone. Without even sacrificing a single soldier, without even injuring a single person or taking a single life, he appeased the mob and resolved the danger of them rushing into the palace gate.

"Alas! Even though his guards had reacted in time, the assassins that had hidden themselves among the mob and had plotted for this for a long time prepared six hidden swords and sharp blades that had venom spread on the blades. At that time, I was terribly busy with my foreign affairs assignments, which were progressing from bad to worse. When I learned that the royal family had been assassinated... Ha..."

Thales looked into Gilbert's eyes. For a long while, the child did not say a single word.

The boy recalled how Jines had told him about Prince Midier a few weeks ago, in a

manner that was completely uncharacteristic of her, and her last few sentences had been especially unlike her.

"Thales, I know what Gilbert told you today, but I don't know what you think about it. Still... I still remember that Prince Midier had handed me a letter in the past. I only wish to tell you the contents of the letter in its original words.

"Madam, I spared you because I admire you, not because I am merciful towards you.

"I admire your courage, which allowed you to break free of your shackles and chains.

"However, since you have made the decision, please do not hesitate. Do not be weak and return to the cage that once suffocated you. Do not let the cage in your mind chain the wings that will lead you to freedom, much less let those illusory rules make you sacrifice your true self.

"I sincerely give you my blessings and wish that your life will now belong to you from now onwards.

"I hope that you will pass the police qualification test."

Thales was absorbed in his thoughts of thinking about the meaning behind these words. What sort of state of mind would a prince, who was born into this 'cage' he spoke of, have when he said these words?

When Gilbert regained Thales' attention from his memories and his absent-minded state, they began their afternoon lesson.

As Thales listened to Gilbert use ancient proverbs and poems as examples to explain the four different voices in the lingua franca the humans used, he stole a glance at the pile of books by his hand.

He did not tell Gilbert the truth just now. He was not searching for the Jadestar Family history, neither did he want to understand his uncle, who was like a saint.

Thales wanted to search for information regarding the Mystics.

From the first day he arrived in Mindis Hall, Thales had already been planning to research 'Mystics'. Once he went through the matter in Vine Manor and triggered the unstable but effective explosion, he became even more desperate to examine his

secrets.

And once Gilbert was talking about the history of the Battle of Eradication while also showing his attitude towards those 'calamities'—'Mystics' like Asda—Thales became even more terrified.

Thales whispered to himself softly, "Even though... Yodel might have heard my conversation with Asda."

'Battle of Eradication Chronicles: The World's Destruction', 'From the Final Empire to Constellation', and 'Cahill Yarrow's Travel Notes: Supplementary Information before the Great Crack and Sink'. These three books were his true targets hidden among all the other history books used as a diversion. They were about the Battle of Eradication and the truth behind Mystics—the 'calamity'.

No matter what, before he could be certain of his own safety, it would be best if he did not reveal the strange 'mystic ability' within himself. Once he has learned how to read and write, then he would start searching through the books. That was the safest method.

However, now, Thales had to start copying the different voices used by nobles in their choice of words.

Compared to the relaxed attitude and the carefree air he set up, he was mumbling in his heart, hoping that Gilbert would not personally look through these books, that he would leave right after he finished conducting the class, and that he would not help Thales bring those books back to his room.

If everything went smoothly, then these peaceful and quiet days would continue. Perhaps he would be able to gain some progress in regards to understanding his secrets.

However, Thales soon discovered that a quiet life would forever be just an illusion to people like him.

For example, Thales did not know that there was a meeting about him, regarding the secret he was trying to hide, being held in a spot not too far away from Mindis Hall.

And his secret was in danger of being exposed.

Yodel stood quietly under the shade of a tree, as if he was waiting respectfully for the person in the pitch-black carriage in front of him. However, all those who had fought against Yodel before would know that Yodel was incredibly tense at that instant and was in a state where he would attack at any moment.

"It's been a while, young Yodel."

As an old and hoarse voice travelled into the air, an old figure walked with faltering footsteps out of the door to the carriage, which had been pushed open by the king himself.

Although the intuition of those in supreme class already allowed Yodel to know just who the other person in the carriage other than the king was, when Yodel saw him with his own eyes, his brows still furrowed against his will behind his mask.

It was an old man dressed by a plain, black, long robe. He held a wooden black cane in his hand. His hair was thinning and white. There were a lot of wrinkles on his face. He had average looks and did not stand out. In fact, he would not even be able to leave behind an impression to even the sharpest person.

"Aren't you going to say hello to your father?" An aged and hoarse voice rose from the old man's throat languidly. It was a voice that seemed to have been born from the nurturing care of darkness, causing it to be emotionless and monotonous.

Yodel chose to remain silent in the face of the old man's question.

The man grinned, revealing gums that had very few teeth left, "Alright, I almost forgot. Even if you have my blood flowing through your veins, your family name is Cato, not Hansen."

Yodel still provided him with no reaction.

"I just returned." The old man seemed to be long-since used to Yodel's attitude. He was completely unbothered by it and continued speaking, "There is also something interesting in the results of the investigation about Red Street Market brought to me by my children."

Yodel still did not answer him.

The old man chuckled softly, then said, "The Air Mystic, Asda Sakern, whom the Secret

Intelligence Department had been searching for twelve years but to no avail, has been verified to have returned to the capital, and appeared in Red Street Market."

The gears on Yodel's mask began turning inconspicuously.

"Blood Bottle Gang may be the gang he built with that homicidal maniac, but the famous Air Mystic had clearly not personally gone to the place to destroy the Brotherhood and cripple their forces."

Yodel did not speak, but the gears behind his mask were turning even faster.

The old man let out a bark of laughter that was unpleasant to the ears using that hoarse voice of his. "Don't be nervous, Sir Cato. I only listened to His Majesty's orders and investigated how you managed to seal a Mystic even though you had the royal family's kin with you."

Yodel's head shot up!

The pair of Crystal Drop glass lenses on the mask instantly turned from a dark color to a bright yellow as Yodel stared at the old man.

"That mask is still as annoying as ever, even though I've suggested to His Majesty since a long time ago to make you throw it away..."

The old man leaned against his cane, as if he did not notice the eyes that were staring at him behind the glass lenses. He staggered forward and stood before Yodel before he laughed in a manner that was unpleasant to the ears.

"Now then... Sir Yodel Cato, as one of the bearers of the legendary anti-mystic equipment, the Supreme Sword and Shield, can you explain clearly to me what exactly happened to the Air Mystic on that night?"

Chapter 43

The Truth About Red Street Market

8 P.M. at Red Street Market.

The police station and the Town Hall had already been evacuated two days ago.

In contrast to the places that were ruined by the battle and needed rebuilding, Red Street Market had already reopened for business.

The entire street was brightly lit, full of hubbub and people moving about. The lowest-ranking gang members beckoned with their hands from the dark alleys as they waited for people. They would negotiate for a while before hastily entering a single-storey house.

At the front of a premier club, elegant hostesses solicited all kinds of customers from old drunkards to awkward virgins, and those born in influential families to foul smelling merchants. With their dazzling service and eye-catching, naked bodies, they devoured their customers' wallets.

The best was the numerous, neatly dressed carriage drivers. Their low-profile luxury carriages did not carry any signs or emblems... They would stop at the various clubs. Their servants would then very respectfully invite the ladies, who emerged from the clubs into the carriages before driving off far away. They would only return the next day. These were the truly extravagant and powerful customers. Their hidden identities would have made even the bosses of the big clubs tremble.

Everything was just the same as it was twenty days ago. It was as though Red Street Market had not experienced the bloody and frightening gang fight at all, as though the protectors of the street and tax collectors had not switched from Blood Bottle Gang to Black Street Brotherhood.

Everything, except for Red Street Market Centre.

The ruins of a dozen houses destroyed by an explosion caused by the Air Mystic lay there on the pitch-black site.

At this pitch-black site, dozens of people were busy digging the rubble. The sounds of iron digging into the earth rang non-stop.

Under the moonlight, one of the Six Powerhouses of the Brotherhood, the Chief of Intelligence, Kobryant Lance the Sleepless Eye wore a scarlet cloak. He stood in the middle of the ruins. Looking at the darkness around him and the numerous lights from the distance, he could not help but frown.

'It's too near...' he thought.

'The area of business for that club is too close to our excavation site.'

At a distance, one of the Sleepless whistled. That was a signal. 'Two people passed by. Everything is normal.'

Lance nodded at the other Sleepless in the darkness.

However, he saw the lights turn on at the top floor of the club next door. The light reached the road at their location and illuminated it. Lance snorted.

"It's too near..."

Behind him, a Sleepless immediately departed and chatted with another Brotherhood member for a moment. The latter then walked briskly towards the club.

A little while later, the lights from the club dimmed and the ruins were enveloped in darkness again.

Lance nodded.

'Should have let Rick extend the prohibition on business hours. This affects our work too much. After all, we can only do this at night.'

However, Lance knew that it was better and faster to just have the nobles slice off a part of their territory to the Brotherhood than to prohibit Red Street Market from doing business, and make the nobles endure another day.

Lance slowly walked forward.

It had been ten days and ten nights. They had dug a full ten meters deep and twenty

meters wide hole beneath the chess room. However, they found nothing.

'Right now, we can still hide behind excuses like "seeking for trails of the Air Mystic" or "finding out the truth behind the deaths of the Talon siblings and Moria". However, if we still cannot find it, we will risk being discovered by certain people,' Lance thought solemnly.

'No secret stuff or dead bodies. Nothing is hidden in the darkness, not even the likes of poisonous snakes. Regardless, Red Street Market already belongs to the Brotherhood now.

'Fortunately, the Air Mystic destroyed the surroundings with his explosion. Otherwise, we would have had to rack our brains and talk with those somewhat influential house-owners in Red Street Market. Then, we would have to seize their rights to their property before we can begin our excavation work.

'However, the current situation isn't that bad. If it had gone as planned, it could have taken more than a year and a half before excavation can even begin. But this time, excavation already started a few days after Red Street Market was captured.

'Naturally, excavating without a reason makes it harder to keep things a secret.

'That means I have to dig faster.' Lance could not help but feel depressed.

It was at this moment when a rough and triumphant voice shouted from a distance, "I found it!"

Lance could not help but move. He waved away one of the Sleepless and walked briskly ahead.

"I found it, Kobryant!" A tall and thin figure held a long object wrapped in a piece of cloth as he came over.

This man had a long and narrow face. He had dark blond, curly hair which draped over his shoulders. He wore black leather straps below his right and left ribs as well as at his waist, which held his three daggers. Thick bandages were wrapped around both of his arms. The man was tall, only slightly shorter than the two-meter tall Cenza. It was a pity that his thin body affected his external look.

The 'Ripper' Anton Lewandowski, one of the Six Powerhouses of the Brotherhood, was

the leader responsible for smuggling strategic resources such as the Eternal Oil and Crystal Drop Ore. He held the long object covered in soil excitedly in his arms as he approached Lance.

There was another fat figure behind him, also one of the Six Powerhouses. Morris, who was in charge of the human trafficking business walked up towards them, feeling cross.

"This should be it! I opened it a little to take a look... Wow. It looks just like the picture..." Anton's voice sounded particularly piercing with his boorish accent.

"You'd never expect that after digging for ten days and almost reaching the sewer, you'd find it not buried under the ground but hidden in a partition between the basement floor and the ground. If I had not stepped on it when I was taking a leak... Hahaha. I've already said before that we should not complicate things too much for ourselves. You and Morris were like retards digging the ground for ten days... Hahaha..."

Behind him, Morris crossed his arms and gritted his teeth, looking unhappy.

"Look! I only came for five minutes and thought of peeing before I left..."

Lance, who had endured this for more than ten seconds could not take it anymore. For the last ten years, this Eastern Peninsular Nedanese man could never finish rambling.

"Shut up, thin person!" Lance grabbed the long object from Anton forcefully, regardless of the dirt on it. His hand trembled as he opened it up.

Anton wanted to say more, but Morris maliciously knocked into him from behind and caused him to stumble.

"Fatty... Perhaps you are jealous that I am—"

"Shut up, Anton!" Morris shouted fiercely.

Lance gently covered it again with the cloth.

"Right," Lance said softly. However, he could not hide the excitement in his voice. "This is it!"

Lance held the object as though he was gently caressing his lover. "After so much hard work, to grab Red Street Market without alarming the Mystic or Secret Intelligence—it has finally paid off!"

"Hey." Anton looked unhappy as he opened up his hands. "Who said we didn't disturb the Mystic? Who do you think caused this place to be in ruin?"

Morris calmly said, "The appearance of the Air Mystic was just a coincidence. Even the Black Sword could not draw him out. However, the Mystic does not know about this object. However, I was thinking that Asda might realize what this is, which is why he gave up the opportunity to kill the Black Sword and rushed back to the capital. He usually pokes his head into battles for the small territories—He may have knowledge that we are looking for a weapon that can deal with him."

"However, we have already found it right under the nose of the Air Mystic," Lance said as he looked at the outlines of the object.

As they spoke of the Air Mystic, the three became silent for a moment.

"When I got the news, I thought that you and Cenza were going to die in Red Street Market." Lance broke the silence and sighed.

Morris hung his head. His eyes were shrouded in darkness. "We were lucky. You should have seen Moria and the Talon siblings. He still likes to crush people into human balls."

"What happened to him?" Anton's eyes showed an astonished expression.

Lance held the package and closed his eyes. "He probably met his nemesis, but he is surely not dead."

Anton gritted his teeth hard, having mixed feelings of fear and hatred. "Having said that, it has been 12 years... Even now, I still do not dare to believe... I've personally seen the Black Sword kill him three times... three times..."

Morris somberly gritted his teeth. "Then he came back to life. He resurrected three times within two hours."

"Four times." Lance added silently. "Charleton killed that creature once after that royalty was poisoned outside the doors of the Imperial Palace."

The atmosphere around the three immediately became depressing.

Anton looked at the long object. With doubt and lingering fear, he asked, "We've been looking for this for over a decade, but is this thing really useful? After all, this continent is full of anti-mystic weapons."

Lance did not hesitate to speak, "Those things can only weaken the influence of the Mystic's power a little. Only the Sovereign State's legendary anti-mystic equipment can deal with a Mystic. Morat told me this when he was still a part the Secret Intelligence."

"I am not too keen on believing in your former boss." Anton's expression changed as though he had remembered something and he shuddered. "That old man... even his saliva is poisonous."

Morris asked, looking worried. "That's right. The Kingdom's Secret Intelligence has not interfered with our current operation? After all, according to your argument, this is a legendary anti-mystic weapon that is not found in the records. This is even more serious compared to privately owning a Mystic Gun."

'Privately owning a Mystic Gun, hmm?' Lance gently expressed disdain in his heart.

'Privately owning a Mystic Gun would only mean the death penalty. As for concealing a legendary anti-mystic weapon that's not in the records? Hmph.'

However, Lance simply shook his head. "The king is almost 48 years old. The selection of nobles is enough of a problem for them already. Besides, I've had dealings with Eckstedt's Secret Room. With Ramon attracting all of the Secret Intelligent Department's attention, Morat will not discover our objective. I understand my teacher too well."

"It is fortunate that both the Blood Bottle Gang's Mystic and the Secret Intelligence Department do not know the importance of this thing..." Lance pondered as he caressed the object wrapped in cloth.

"That's right. Do we not tell Cenza, Fischer and Roda about the truth of this matter?" As he spoke of the other three Powerhouses, Anton mimicked the two men and frowned. "In any case, the Air Mystic has vanished."

Lance solemnly shook his head and handed the package to Morris. "Nikolay and

Catherine have gone out to look for the Blood Mystic. Believe me, I have seen the records of the Secret Intelligence. Along with the Blood Mystic, Asda is much more honest and kind compared to His Highness, Midier."

"Just us, the three Powerhouses and the Black Sword are enough to deal with the Mystics. It would be safer for the others if they know less." Morris nodded his head and tied up the object properly. He then said with a solemn voice, "For the former Nine Powerhouses."

Anton and Lance were also somber as they softly said, "For the former Nine Powerhouses."

Chapter 44

Morat Hansen (One)

There was a long silence, but the old man seemed very patient as he waited for Yodel's answer.

Finally, the voice of the secret protector came from behind the mask.

"You should not be here," Yodel said coldly.

Anyone present would have noticed that Yodel's voice was very similar to the old man in front of him.

The black-clad old man did not speak. Instead, he looked at Yodel with a peculiar smile.

His eyes did not move.

In spite of that, even though he was at the peak of the supreme class, Yodel could feel the old man's presence gradually pressing on him.

"That night, all three and a half of the legendary anti-mystic weapons that could seal Mystics were at their respective locations." The old man in black leaned on his walking stick. He grinned and spoke slowly.

"The Constellation Staff is a symbol of monarchy and it is always held by His Majesty. The Ruler's Spear was wielded by the Legendary Wing, who was guarding the western front... The Kingdom's Wrath was at a countryside manor, cleaning the Motionless Bow... That leaves the half piece, the Supreme Shield, which along with the Fortress Flower were at the Broken Dragon Fortress in the north."

Yodel inhaled gently.

"The remaining half is the Supreme Sword, which has just been thawed not too long ago, and followed you to the Lower City District, Yodel Cato.

"It was also that night the Air Mystic disappeared from Red Street Market, which was

at the border of the Lower City District and Western District."

The old man grinned again. His grin was unsightly. "I had originally wanted to praise you. The last time someone was able to perform the magnificent feat of sealing a Mystic by himself can be traced back to the Ancient Empire."

Yodel's hand slowly clasped the dark-colored, cross-shaped short sword under his sleeve.

"But..." Morat's pupils contracted as the topic of discussion suddenly changed.

"You should have laid low when you were tasked to receive the Kingdom's blood. Why did you risk your life and seal the Air Mystic? Don't tell me that you wanted to be an angel of justice."

Yodel did not speak for a long time.

The old man became impatient. The wrinkles on his face trembled as he said, "Or should I report to His Majesty and have him personally ask you?"

After a long time, Yodel took a deep breath. Confronted by one of the five most frightening people in the Constellation, he lightly replied in a hoarse voice.

"That night, I saw Asda Sakern at Red Street Market. He was on Thales' escape path."

The old man in black continued to stare at him, as though this was nothing new.

However, no one knew that at this moment, Yodel was carefully considering his choice of words.

"For Thales, I had no choice but to take action."

"Although the Supreme Sword is only half of the entire piece of the legendary anti-mystic equipment, it was enough to seal the Air Mystic."

The old man in black gently coughed twice. The eyes on his ordinary looking face suddenly lit up.

"I believe you won't mind telling me about all the details before he was sealed? From things like his words to his emotions, his attitude to his actions. I am very curious.

Why did Asda return to the capital? This is a very dangerous place to him."

Yodel lightly clenched his fists under his robes.

He had to be careful as he was facing the Black Prophet. He could not lie.

"Asda Sakern is a madman," Yodel murmured.

The Black Prophet laughed softly. His wrinkles twitched for a while. "Of course, all of them are madmen. So what? Even madmen have their own thoughts and actions. Am I right?"

"He was very excited before he was sealed," Yodel slowly answered after taking his words into consideration.

The old man stroked his cane. His dry lips parted. "You'll never be able to understand their emotions... They aren't human anymore, so how could it even be possible for them to have emotions?"

'This nonsense will not be able to distract his attention,' Yodel thought in his heart.

Yodel hesitated for a second before deciding that he had to say it.

He had to.

"He said..." Yodel's hoarse voice could be heard behind the mask.

"He said that he found a new Mystic."

...

[As recorded in history, the first time a Mystic appeared was during the era of the Ancient Empire, about a thousand years ago. It was somewhere between the year 825 to 835 in the Imperial Calendar.]

'The Empire from a thousand years ago? The Imperial Calendar ran for another fifteen hundred years since the Ancient Empire reached the end of its era and became the current Empire. We then switched to the Calendar of Eradication. It is currently the year 672 based on the Calendar of Eradication.'

Thales recalled the basic knowledge he learned during the past few days.

'In other words, the Mystics had appeared more than one thousand three hundred years ago?'

However, it was not a good time for him to be thinking absentmindedly.

Under the sandy land's setting sun, Thales gritted his teeth despite the pain in his left shoulder. The seven-year-old held his heavy, wooden shield and charged towards Jines.

[According to the incomplete records of the Ascetic Tower, a caravan heading towards the Alchemy Tower witnessed an unusually huge bolt of lightning. On the same day, thousands of members from one of the tribes a hundred miles outside the God of War Desert turned into corpses.]

'Lightning? Why is the Air Mystic able to control air? Are they the Fantastic Four? Maybe they're actually elementalists.'

Jines stepped forward without batting an eyelid. She cleverly positioned her wooden shield and struck Thales' shield.

Clank

Thales was knocked back and he lost his balance. He fell awkwardly towards the side of the shield.

Thales gasped with his sword resting on the ground while his heart beat in anxiety.

Jines saw the state Thales was in and started screaming at the boy, "What the hell were you thinking of? Being absent-minded on the field is the same as committing suicide!"

Thales shook his head. He made a great effort to drive away the contents of 'The Battle of Eradication Chronicles: The World's Destruction' from his head. However, his efforts were fruitless. Thoughts concerning the contents about Mystics constantly emerged in his mind.

[The Alchemist Tower was as mysterious as usual. There were no explanations about it, and it could not even be found in historical records. Existing history books of the Ancient Empire also did not contain information about it. However, it managed to

foreshadow the subsequent, tragic war that is the Battle of Eradication.]

'What are the Ascetic Tower and the Alchemy Tower? Are these organizations or places?'

Thales held the center of the wooden shield and struggled to swing his wooden sword, which was not much lighter than the shield. He twisted his face as he swung his body and sword around.

[The war began in the year 1509 of the Imperial Calendar. However, no historical data could identify why the Battle of Eradication started. It was as though all the hostile parties suddenly stood at the opposite ends of a chessboard and started fighting.]

'Why? Why are there no proper records of the beginning of a war that changed everything?'

Jines moved effortlessly to dodge the edge of his sword. She then used the hilt of her sword to gently push Thales, who had already lost his balance.

Gilbert shook his head as he watched from the sidelines.

Bump

Thales once again fell to the ground. He fell face first like a dog eating sand.

Ptui.

Thales spat out the sand in his mouth. Once again, he grabbed the shield and stood up.

"Enough!" Jines shouted unhappily.

"Seven sets of attack patterns and you are only putting on a show. Your efficiency is completely different from the time you learned defensive tactics. If you are not a fool, it means you do not have the heart to practice today!"

Thales gasped. He nodded, full of shame and regret.

"Sorry, Madam Jines."

[The number of Mystics were less than the legendary dragons. At the very least, there

were forty dragons whose names were recorded. However, the number of Mystics who appeared in the Battle of Eradication were only ten.]

'Ten people? Ten against the world?'

"Boy!"

Seeing that Thales was still in an absent-minded state, Jines angrily threw her shield and wooden sword down. "Get out of class! Tomorrow morning, get up at six and make up for today's progress!"

Gilbert was also frowning. He did not know what was wrong with Thales.

He then noticed Jines turning her head and shouting to him, "He is yours before dinner. Fix him up."

Gilbert smiled, lifted his hat and bowed.

Thales threw the wooden sword away, feeling dispirited. He began to deal with his left arm. It had been bruised by the shield again.

[Despite the fact that there were not many of them, the majority of casualties from the United Army were caused by the Mystics. The most famous record was on May 1514 of the Imperial Calendar. The battle in the eastern front of the Sighing Mountains was slowly progressing to victory. However, when the Power Mystic appeared, eight thousand of the Mountain Elves Patrol and fifty thousand black-armored elites of the Dynasty Dawn Army were destroyed.]

'Power Mystic? Power? A one-man show. Fifty-eight thousand. What kind of power could cause such a massacre? It is almost comparable to an atomic bomb. Can Asda do this too?

Wearing an unhappy expression, Jines rubbed her palms together and was about to leave. However, she saw a guard walking in solemnly and whispering a few words to Gilbert.

The very next moment, Thales was surprised to see Gilbert's look of shock, worry and fear.

'The diplomatically experienced and poker-faced Count Cato is actually capable of

showing such expressions of worry and fear?'

While Thales was still being puzzled, Gilbert had stopped Jines. Gilbert then said, "His Highness sends a message. Lord Morat Hansen will be coming to the Mindis Hall tonight. He wants to see Mister Thales."

'Morat Hansen? Who is that?'

Thales was surprised to see the change in facial expression of the first-grade female official, Kessel the Fifth's lover.

'It is shocking, worrying and... upsetting?'

Jines' eyes grew cold as she spoke, "He would have come sooner or later to meet the Royal Bloodline and successor of the throne.

"He is Chief of the Kingdom's Secret Intelligence Department, Black Prophet Morat. It would be impossible for him not to get involved..."

...

The old man in black, Morat Hansen, no longer spoke.

For the first time, Yodel noticed the eternally mysterious and weird-looking Morat, appearing alarmed and... afraid.

"A new Mystic?"

After saying that, Morat took a huge step back. Suddenly, he looked up!

'It is working!' Yodel thought to himself.

Morat knew too many secrets including the Mystics. However, it was because he knew too much that he was more likely to be distracted by these things. He missed what Yodel really wanted to hide, for instance, the communication between Asda and Thales.

It was just like the current situation.

"Impossible. The birth of a Mystic needs..." Morat looked shocked. He held his walking

stick tightly and stared unwaveringly at Yodel's mask as though he wanted to break the Purple Crystal Drop with that look.

"Who is it?" Morat's eyes seemed frenzied.

"Who is the new Mystic?"

Morat stared at his son like a poisonous snake with sharp pupils.

"You know how serious this is?!" Morat frowned and focused his gaze. He started breathing faster and held on to the cane even tighter. "The new Mystic. Before that thing... Get rid of it."

Yodel regulated his breathing. Breathing, an easy thing for supreme class masters, right now, seemed very difficult.

'Thing. What thing?'

The figure of the boy with black hair and grey pupils gradually appeared in his mind.

"They would stay with you... I will go alone." The stubborn boy with the determined look at Sunset Pub vaguely appeared before his eyes.

Yodel gently clenched his fist as Morat slowly narrowed his eyes.

"Asda did not mention or know his name." Yodel carefully selected the true information and organized it into words. "After that, I sealed Asda."

'The man really did not know Thales' name. I am not lying,' Yodel told himself.

Morat did not speak and only gave Yodel a weird look.

A few seconds later, Morat turned his eyes away.

"Very good. You did not lie," The man said affirmatively with a solemn expression.

"However, this is very bad. Precisely because you did not lie," Morat added gloomily.

Yodel relaxed, feeling that he got away.

"Now, let us see that Sir Thales, as according to His Majesty's command." Morat hid his gloomy and solemn expression. Once again, he displayed an ugly and terrible smile as he walked towards Mindis Hall.

Yodel's breathing suddenly stopped.

Morat stroked his cane as he exposed his few remaining teeth. He turned around and laughed. "I am sure you do not mind me asking that boy about what really happened at Red Street Market, and also about the so-called new Mystic.

"Do not misunderstand. This is just a professional habit, just... to see if you are hiding anything."

Yodel looked up, his eyes were filled with an intense expression as Morat laughed happily.

Chapter 45

Morat Hansen (Two)

In Mindis Hall, the guards invited the visiting guests to proceed to the second floor of the reception room. Then, they closed the door in an orderly fashion.

"Say what you want to say, and then leave." In the hall fully illuminated by the Everlasting Lamp, the old man in black looked at Jines, who was standing in front of Thales and was currently speaking to him harshly.

Thales calmly gazed at the old man leaning on the walking stick as though he was about to collapse. The old man was looking at everyone with suspicion.

"Still so cold, Officer Bajkovic?" Morat's old and hoarse voice passed through Thales' ears from the other side of the spacious hall. It was very unpleasant and indescribably strained. The man then mockingly said, "After all, we have cooperated more than once."

Jines sneered. "Cooperated? Who would cooperate with a poisonous snake? It was His Majesty's command and I had to comply with it at that time."

Morat shook his head regretfully as though he was really sad. "How disappointing. I had thought that we fought on the same side. You know, I have always imagined you as my daughter."

In between his words, Morat's eyes gleamed. "You know, the biological daughter I personally raised up."

Morat stressed on the word 'biological'.

Thales was surprised to see the expression of the usually proud Jines suddenly change. It was as though she was being grabbed by the throat.

The proud and imposing female court official immediately turned around so that the others could no longer see her expression.

"With all due respect!"

By the side, Gilbert interrupted the conversation and solemnly bowed. "Lord Hansen, you know all too well the importance of everything here to the Kingdom. Please leave out unnecessary probes and pleasantries."

Thales was even more surprised to see Gilbert, who always had manners befitting all occasions, appearing to become angry.

Gilbert's eyes had a dazzling gleam and his words were sharp. "We all know that you are the Chief of Secret Intelligence. You are in charge of the Kingdom's Secret Intelligence and you have contributed greatly for Constellation. That is why you came earlier than planned to meet the future 'king'. In that case, let us not delay further — This is Sir Thales."

Gilbert had specifically said the words 'Chief of Secret Intelligence' and 'Lord'.

Thales suddenly realized that the former was for Thales' ears while the latter was a warning to Morat.

'The biggest boss in the gathering of intelligence.' Thales filed this information in his mind.

The atmosphere surrounding the room was not too good.

Gilbert respectfully took a step back, exposing Thales before Morat's sight.

Morat gazed at the boy, who was now in everyone's full view.

At that moment, Thales felt as though the man's pitch-black eyes had some kind of magic. It was like the eyes could penetrate through him.

Thales even had the feeling of not being able to breathe.

Morat slowly walked forward while tapping on the ground with his walking stick, creating an ominous rhythm in the process.

Tap... Tap... Tap

Behind him, the Masked Protector Yodel also stepped forward slowly.

"This is far enough," Gilbert said coldly.

The sounds of Morat's footsteps and walking stick continued. He gazed unwaveringly at Thales, but he continued to walk forward. His hoarse voice was then heard. "Count Caso truly deserves to be the Royal Family's most trusted chamberlain. I really admire your loyalty to the Lord, whether it was to the previous king, or to his 'successor' now."

Thales noticed that the word 'successor' was heavily stressed.

The moment Morat's voice ceased, Thales suddenly felt the imposing air on the sharp-tongued Gilbert vanishing.

Gilbert frowned as if he was thinking about something that had gone wrong.

The well-spoken and quick-witted former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Caso ended up gritting his teeth. He no longer spoke, bearing with Morat's approach.

Thales felt cold sweat flowing down his back as he saw the old man in black closing in on him.

'What is his role?

'With just a few words and a heavy tone, the powerful Jines and the shrewd, experienced Gilbert retreated without a sound?'

"So, this little gentleman," Morat said with a wrinkly smile. He sounded warm before coldly asking, "It must have been difficult, escaping from Red Street Market and the Mystic."

'Mystic?'

Jines and Gilbert both lifted their heads. They looked at Thales in surprise when they heard this.

Thales' heart shook violently. He instinctively looked behind Morat. The secret guard was standing there silently. However, Thales was acutely aware that the guard seemed somewhat stiff and tense.

'Yodel. Did you tell him everything about my secret?'

Morat laughed again. The eyes on his wrinkled face were sharp. "In fact, there are some minor questions I want to ask you... privately."

Thales gulped.

"No. Thales cannot be with him alone!" Jines was the first to react. She then glanced grimly at Gilbert, as if asking for help.

Gilbert looked at Morat with a foul expression as well. "Sir Thales has a respected status. He has the right to choose whether he is to be accompanied by his retinue when coming into contact with the Kingdom's Chief of Intelligence."

Thales frowned and looked at Morat.

'What does he want to ask me?'

This time, Morat leaned on his walking stick respectfully and bowed politely. He then said, "Of course, of course. Whether or not he wants to talk to me is also his choice."

"After all, he will become my king in the future, assuming my old bones could live that long."

Gilbert glanced strangely at the Black Prophet, seemingly suspicious of why the Chief of Secret Intelligence was being so friendly. Only Jines' expression changed as she looked at Thales.

Thales felt relieved.

However, just as Thales was about to say that he was not feeling well that day, Morat's said something which made him pause.

"In fact, I would also like to report some things to you in private."

Morat again bowed submissively.

When the old man looked up again, he had a smile on his face. "For example, things about three children from the Lower City District and a young bartender... According to the information I gathered, the Brotherhood is dealing with a matter regarding an escape of its members from the Brotherhood..."

At that moment, Thales clenched his right fist.

'Three children from the Lower City District?

'Young bartender?'

Thales' pupils contracted.

'Sinti, Ryan, Coria and also... Jala.'

"Very well!"

Thales ignored Jines' anxious expression and Gilbert's surprised look. He took a step forward and resolutely said, "Let us talk privately."

Morat, whose face was crowded with his smile and wrinkles, turned to the side and said, "Then let us move to the study."

At this moment, someone's voice shot into the air.

"Discuss it here."

Thales turned around in surprise.

The one who spoke was the man standing behind Morat. It was Yodel, who had been silent throughout the entire night.

The hoarse voice came from the strange, masked man. "We can leave. Only by doing this can I ensure his safety."

Morat seemed to be stunned for a moment as he turned his head and frowned.

After Gilbert snapped out of his stupor, he exchanged a glance with Jines. The two then nodded with determination. "Just discuss things here."

Thump

Morat leaned on his walking stick and turned around to look at Yodel.

"Why does everyone assume that I, who have served Constellation for decades, would

endanger its only heir, the blood of the Kingdom?" Morat's eyes turned cold, but an unpleasant smile immediately formed across his face.

"Fine. Let us discuss here then."

Yodel nodded slightly. He then loosened his grip on the Supreme Sword that he had been holding the entire night.

"But you better not play any tricks, shadow attendant." Morat smiled at the masked guard. He then pointed at his head. "I will know where you are no matter where you hide."

Thales clenched his fists as he saw Morat's strange smile.

Chapter 46

Imminent Disaster

Yodel, Gilbert and the worried Jines—who kept turning her head back—silently left the hall with different paced footsteps.

In the hall filled with Everlasting Lamps, Thales could be seen sitting at the host's seat. Morat was sitting at a distance behind the banquet table.

The place was silent.

But there was nervousness in the air.

Thales pretended to relax his shoulders, and he gave a smile that he usually carried while he was a beggar.

However, he still felt the biting gaze of the old man in black clothes, which were trained unwaveringly on him.

Thales felt uneasy from the abnormal atmosphere. His mind grappled firmly with the little information available.

'The Chief of the Secret Intelligence Department.

'Chief of Intelligence.

'Black Prophet.

'Poisonous snake.

'He also knows about my previous identity as a beggar as well as Red Street Market and... the Mystic.'

Morat seemed to have lost his patience. He abandoned his soft demeanor and spoke harshly in an extremely sharp voice, "I will get straight to the point, child. I just want to know about the night you escaped from Red Street Market and what the Mystic said

to you when you met him."

'How did he know that Asda talked to me? Did Yodel betray me?'

Thales' brain was spinning quickly, but there were too many variables and too much information to deal with.

'What did Yodel say to him? How much did he say?'

'How much does Morat know about Asda, about Blood Bottle Gang and about my mystic power running out of control?'

Thales' apprehensive mind came to a conclusion. 'Whatever happens... I have to first ensure my own safety.'

Since that night Quide came to the sixth house looking for his hidden copper coins, the beggar and heir, Thales had been accustomed to his involuntary, precarious, and lonely fate. He had always tried his utmost to survive.

Thales expressed doubtful excitement. He then said, "What?" Oh, that Mystic! You are talking about the legendary boss of Blood Bottle Gang?"

Morat gently narrowed his eyes, looking puzzled and hesitant.

Thales then held his head, as though he was recalling the incident. "I remember that there was confusion everywhere that night. The boss of Blood Bottle Gang said—"

However, things did not go as he expected.

"Child!"

He was interrupted.

Morat was expressionless as he leaned against his walking stick. His voice resounded in Thales' ears.

Morat's eyes widened and he looked straight into Thales' eyes, causing Thales to feel a chill run down his spine. "You have an innate talent for lying and acting. However, what I want to ask you is about... your old friend, Asda Sakern."

Thales was startled.

"I will ask again. What did Asda say to you before Yodel appeared and sealed him?"

Morat's eyes seemed to burn as he waited for Thales' answer.

Thales, who had been interrupted, stopped and lowered his head.

'What does he know? Does he know that I met Asda? Did he see through me?

'Either way, this is not good.' He felt apprehensive.

Thales tried his best to calm down. 'This old man... is probably the most difficult person I have ever dealt with. However, since he is asking me about this, he must not know about what Asda said to me.'

Thales gritted his teeth. 'In particular, he does not know that I am the same kind as Asda.'

In spite of that, Morat's following words once again smashed his thoughts into pieces.

"Let me remind you again, boy." Morat laughed unpleasantly.

"Did Asda not find a newly born Mystic?"

At that moment, Thales felt his heart turn cold in fear.

The boy thought in alarm. 'Yodel... What did Yodel tell him? Why is he so certain?'

"Hahaha." Morat broke out in a strange laughter. "People fear me for a reason."

The old man moved forward step-by-step with his walking stick and approached Thales.

At that point, Thales had the urge to escape.

"I am a Psionic. Although I do not like this ability, it helps me a lot."

A discouraging thought flashed through Thales' mind.

"There is no need for you to lie anymore concerning the Air Mystic.

"I can clearly see into your mind. Asda, that handsome, pretty boy clothed in blue. My god, he is still so young!"

Morat's words were like a hammer hitting Thales' chest.

However, the engrossed Morat was not done. His words made Thales shiver as he uttered his words one after another.

"What is that in Asda's hand, a blue ball? I can see three balls of flesh there. He still likes to squash humans into little meatballs, eh?

"Why is it so dark around the both of you? Where exactly are the both of you?"

Morat looked pleased as though he was reading an interesting travel log.

Thales' mind turned blank and he instinctively trembled.

'Clothed in blue?

'Handsome, pretty boy?

'Blue ball?

'Squashed human flesh?

'A dark location?

'How does he know this? How could he have known this?'

Thales even felt his breathing hitch.

Morat looked very tired. He lowered his head and rubbed his nose. "Ah, it is really strenuous to use this ability. I cannot use it so often."

He then lifted his head and laughed, revealing an ugly and wrinkled smile. He looked at the now pale Thales and said, "That is why the others call me the 'Black Prophet'."

Thales was so shocked he was speechless. Morat then opened his mouth and said the

most malignant thing to the boy.

"That is right, child.

"I can read minds."

This time, Thales truly felt that he was facing an imminent disaster.

...

"What do we do now?" Standing at the corridor on the second floor, the first-class, female official, Jines looked at the two men in front of her with a dreadful expression. "You all know of Morat's ability and capability. He uses secrets, information, scandals and everything you can think of to control anybody he wants to control."

Jines took a few steps and added scornfully, "Are you going to just let that child... He is very smart, very mature and he has potential... but that is the Black Prophet in there with him!

"The omniscient Black Prophet!"

Gilbert said in a serious tone, "I am aware of his ability. Without the help of the Secret Intelligence Department, how could we have managed to sign the Fortress Treaty?"

"Yet, you still allowed him... That bastard Kessel. What is he thinking?" Jines angrily slammed down on the railings with her palm. The huge force caused a dent in the railings, which were made out of cedar wood.

At this moment, Gilbert frowned and turned around.

Jines, who had discovered that something was off, also turned around while feeling puzzled.

Except for the motionless guards, only the two of them were in the corridor.

At some point in time, Yodel had disappeared again.

...

Meanwhile, at the Northern City Gate of the Eternal Star City, the guards and the city

defense team on sentry duty had completed their day's shift. They prepared to pull down the huge portcullis, closing the magnificent stone city gate.

'This has been another calm day.' The captain of the city defense team thought as he waved his hand and prepared to change shifts.

However, the keen-eyed sentries on the wall saw some figures on horseback in the distance riding quickly towards the capital.

Behind them, was a white flag.

One sentry on the wall shouted to his colleagues by the gate's locks at the top of his voice, "Wait! Do not shut the gates! There are fast horses! They should be messengers!"

The captain felt uncertain and got up the walls. He saw the cavaliers from the distance.

When the group finally got nearer, the captain was surprised to see a white eagle flag in their hand.

'White eagle?

'The outpost five miles away did not stop them, so they should be important messengers, but... '

With a dignified expression, he stepped out to the front and roared.

"The capital is in front! Slow down immediately!"

"City defense team, interception formation!"

Dozens of soldiers from the city defense team immediately shouted below the city wall. They readied their swords and formed a barricade with their shields, shining like the stars and blocking the gates; a battle array formed against the advancing cavalry.

"Knights! Slow down immediately! Reveal your identity and business!" The captain shouted out from the gates.

The knights below then looked up, but continued to ride at the same speed. They raised a scroll and anxiously shouted, "This is an urgent message from the Mayor of

Cold Castle, the Guardian Duke of the Northern Territory, Val Arunde! This is a Level 7 Emergency!

"Please confer the message directly to the King!

"No one shall block the way! The Duke is on his way!

"This is his personal seal of command!"

As the knights spoke, he raised his hand. The scroll, which was tied to a stone, flew towards the gate, and it was caught firmly in the supra class captain's hand.

'This man is a master and is truly worthy to be a knight of the Northern Territory,' the captain thought as he felt the power from the scroll slamming into his hand.

The captain removed the lacquer seal, then looked at the signature and stamp. He nodded his head and scrambled up the battlement to shout to the array below.

"Everyone, disperse the formation! Let them pass immediately!"

"I cannot thank you enough!" Below the city wall, the knights rushed past the soldiers who had given way. They desperately whipped their horses and galloped towards the center of the capital, surprising many passersby.

"Quickly! Faster, faster!" The lead knight had a frenzied expression as he urged his entire team ahead without any regard for the horses' wellbeing.

The captain looked at the distant knights with a foul expression. "Do not close the gates yet. If what he says is true, we still have the Guardian Duke of the Northern Territory to greet."

'A Level 7 Emergency?

'Ever since I assumed office, the most urgent reports or letters I have ever encountered were ones from the United Army led by His Majesty. I believe there was a war report on the decisive victory against the Barren Bone people and the orcs. I remember that was a Level 6 Emergency.

'So, what just happened?' He was very puzzled.

The captain hesitated for a moment. He then turned his head and asked one of his colleagues behind him.

"When was the last time we had a report declaring a Level 7 Emergency?"

The city defense team looked at each other, feeling uncertain.

"Do we even have a Level 7 Emergency?" a young soldier scratched his head and asked.

There was a moment of silence.

"There was a Level 7," a somber voice answered. The soldiers all turned around to see a veteran, who was at the innermost area.

The veteran looked ghastly pale as though he had recalled a frightening memory.

His lips turned pale as he muttered, "The last time... was twelve years ago."

Chapter 47

Human Reasoning

Renaissance Palace was Eternal Star City's tallest and most important building located at the center of the city.

On the 34th year of the Calendar of Eradication, during the later years of Tormond the First's reign, he copied the style of the Ancient Empire's Capital of Triumph and built this palace. It had six walls surrounding a half-pyramid-shaped palace. After that, at least six supreme kings had expanded or renovated it, with countless craftsmen giving the palace and its walls a classical as well as mottled color. After six hundred years, these gave the palace a look like it had undergone great changes.

After its two hundred and twenty-five steps was the Hall of Stars, supported by twenty-four large pillars. It was large and wide, specially meant for convening the meetings of the Council of National Affairs. The alfresco northern side of the hall overlooked the Star Plaza outside the walls — the Central District's largest business square. At the south, there was a conference room used for the Imperial Conference. In the center was a huge business hall that could cater to large noble assemblies.

At this time, two people were sitting on both sides of the table in that Imperial Conference Room. Under the light of two Everlasting Lamps, the atmosphere was heavy and quiet.

The 39th Supreme King of Constellation, the robust Kessel the Fifth put down the report in his hands. He then lifted his head to look at the weary noble opposite him.

The Suzerain of Cold Castle, Guardian Duke of the North, the forty-nine-year-old Val Arunde narrowed his eyes and looked back at the king.

As one of the Six Big Clans of the Kingdom, Val seemed less like a noble. This was mostly because of the scar that stretched from his chest to his chin. He had neat and short, shaved hair, making it almost unable for others to tell that his hair was dark brown.

Val looked different compared to the other Constellatates. He had black eyes and a

sharp gaze. The bridge of his nose was high and his lips stuck out. He had a thick stubble. The man looked craggy. His chain-mail armor still carried the chill of the North. From time to time, water would drip from the melted frost.

On his chest and shoulders were the white Eagle emblems of the Arunde Family, leader of the Six Great Clans, which had been guarding the North since the time of the Ancient Empire. The eagle was lifelike and had a snowflake in its mouth. It looked at Kessel with its talons spread out.

The Iron Eagle, Duke Val Arunde was closer to a soldier fighting at the frontlines as opposed to a pampered aristocratic suzerain.

"This is an impressive present for my forty-eighth birthday, Duke Arunde," Kessel coldly said.

Val looked up without any signs of weakness. He stared angrily at the king. "So what? Are you going to have me take responsibility by killing me here? The Heirless Kessel?"

...

'Mind reading?'

Thales had a hard time believing it. He could even hear his own heart beating irregularly.

Looking at Morat's eyes, he bitterly thought to himself. 'What can I hide then?'

"Young Sir, there is no need to be overly surprised." Morat gently stroked his staff which looked as ordinary as his staff. "Did you know that I have already seen a lot of people with your current expression?"

Morat revealed his badly damaged set of teeth and laughed horribly. "From criminals... to even the King."

"Hahaha..." Morat laughed.

'I'm against such a man... such a terrifying person... '

Thales' state of mind was in complete chaos.

'I might as well just—'

At this moment...

"Calm down."

A voice whispered in his ear.

"This guy has been lying to you all dis while."

Thales was shocked.

He slammed the table with his hand. The sudden appearance of the young voice shocked him.

Morat laughed and gazed at him with a strange look in his eyes.

"Do not be wwackwess. Wight now, only you can hear my voice."

Thales grabbed the corner of the banquet table tightly and stared closely at Morat, timing his surprise at the sudden voice perfectly with his fearful reaction to Morat's mind reading.

"He does not know how to wwread minds!" A certain loli's young and tender voice entered his ears.

'He does not know how to read minds?'

"However, he can spot a wie," the mysterious voice added.

Thales strongly suppressed the confusion in his mind and closed his eyes tightly.

He then recalled his memories.

"Qiren, the research objective of psychology is focused on the behavior and psychology between individuals. But our research objective is focused on the behavior and psychology of the group. There is a vast difference between the two." The old professor smoked from a pipe and blew out the smoke. He looked at Wu Qiren, who was flipping through the first draft of his thesis and feeling annoyed.

He then smiled and slowly said, "However, there is one thing that is common. Human behavior and psychology has always been unpredictable. They are miracles that cannot be fathomed, predicted, much less be said to possess certain patterns. Faced with such a miracle, we researchers must be modest."

"You also know that attempts to encompass all of human social phenomena with one or more macroscopic theories has long been criticized as being riddled with problems. This is because there has never been a way to thoroughly explain human reason."

The flashbacks from his past life faded like a tide, diffusing into his already huge bank of memories.

Thales suddenly opened his eyes and took a good look at the Black Prophet, who was waiting for his reply.

'It is time for the crucial moment,' Morat Hansen thought silently. He narrowed his eyes with interest and looked at the little boy in front of him.

'However, looking at his appearance, does he really have something critical that Yodel is keeping secret?'

Morat held on tightly to his walking stick. 'Good. Let us see how many more lies he can tell.'

Morat's purpose today was not just to verify Yodel's claims, but to also find clues regarding the newborn Mystic.

Morat breathed in the sweet air. 'Truly a luxurious and decadent smell.'

'The most important thing is to meet the new king and develop his respect as well as reverence towards the Chief of the Secret Intelligence... and also his dependence and obedience towards us. One "assertive" king like Kessel is enough. That is the only way Constellation can shine brilliantly in the darkness.'

Morat thought to himself with satisfaction.

"Wisten to me, speak carefuwwy," Loli's lisping voice softly said in Thales' ear.

He does not know that the Mystic has spoken to you.'

'He only knows what he said himself. I cannot speak anymore or else he will notice. Take care of yourself, awwy.'

The serious revelations from the voice had made him feel a lot more relaxed, but it never returned after that.

Thales sucked in another big breath of air. Although he still looked afraid at that moment, his heart had already regained some confidence.

'It is just another game,' he told himself.

His gray eyes continued to refocus and they were finally fixed on Morat, who was in front of him.

His mind, which was frozen in shock and fear started to work again.

'First, let us sort out the available information.

'Morat is lying.' Thales made this judgement after the loli's reminder.

'First of all, I met the Mystic.'

'Second, the Mystic talked to me.'

'Third, the Mystic found out that I would be the next Mystic.'

The secrets that Thales needed to hide were these three progressive layers of information.

'The problem is, Yodel knows about all three layers of information. If Yodel had told Morat everything, then Morat would not be here at all. The one awaiting for me would have been what Asda called the legendary anti-mystic weapon.'

'I should not have doubted Yodel. From Red Street Market to Vine Manor, he did everything he could to ensure my safety,' Thales told himself while feeling regret in his heart.

""He does not know that the Mystic has spoken to you." The voice said Morat does not know that the Mystic has spoken to me.

'This means that right from the beginning, Morat only knew the first layer of information and the rest of it were lies to draw me out.

'I fell for his trap. I was scared out of my wits, and probably got conned into revealing the second layer of information.

""He only knows what he said himself." The voice also mentioned that Morat only knows what he himself was saying.

'One confirmed fact is, Morat knows that Asda has found a new Mystic!

'But, not more than that. Yodel only told him half of the third layer of information. Morat does not know who the new Mystic is.

""He does not know how to weave minds!" Since Morat cannot read minds, it means that the pinching of his nose bridge to deploy his psionic ability was just a lie. He used it to trick me!

'He was able to see the image of the Air Mystic in my mind... I was really stupid. Asda has not changed his appearance for hundreds of years. How would the Secret Intelligence not know what he looks like?

'It was the same for the ball of energy in Asda's hand. The air-wall is Asda's signature skill.

'He likes to squash people into balls of flesh. After the battle at Red Street Market, those "meatballs" must have been discovered.

'As for it being pitch-black at Red Street Market that night, it is simply nonsense! Even a Class Five Police Officer could say this after an investigation!

Thales frowned and bitterly thought, 'This man's "mind reading" is just skillful use of available information to allow himself to fake being able to read minds. It is an illusion to scare me, to make me submit.

'Now, it is time to verify this.'

Thales looked up in fear and trembled slightly. "Lord Hansen. Since- since you know how to read minds, why do you still ask me? You could just go ahead and read my mind directly..."

Morat smiled and held his walking stick. "I would not be so bold. The minds of those who have had their minds read will become more or less injured. In the end, you are still my future master."

'Yet, you still dared to do it earlier?' Thales snarled in his heart.

"But, if you want to save some trouble, I can follow your wishes and enter straight into your mind. I will try not to hurt—" Morat smiled and stretched out his left hand towards Thales.

Thales waved his hand in a panic. "No, no, no! No need! I might as well tell you directly."

Looking at Thales, Morat shook his head mockingly.

'After all, he is just a seven-year-old.'

"As you command." The Black Prophet lowered his head, the corners of his mouth curled up slightly.

At this point, Thales was certain.

'He tricked me! He tried to trick me again! I called his bluff! Why did you not go to the Dark Night Temple with such good acting skills? However... '

"However, he can spot a lie." This statement made Thales especially careful.

'An incomprehensible, wicked, human lie detector that should only exist in sci-fi novels?

'In other words, in front of the Black Prophet, I cannot say an outright lie. I can only give partial truths to conceal the critical truths.

'Partial truths... ' Thales lamented in his heart. 'Why did I not study in the Department of Journalism?'

Chapter 48

The Wind Shall Rise

In his heart, the transmigrator snapped his fingers.

'Begin.'

"Lord Hansen," Thales said hesitantly, "That night, I ran to Red Street Market. I bumped into a strange person dressed in blue in a chess room as a result.

Morat nodded and smiled while encouraging him to continue.

'Part of it must be the truth. There cannot be lies.' Thales repeated in his heart.

"He said that he didn't have a single person left beside him that he could talk to and wanted me to look at his 'chessboard'."

"After I looked at it, he suddenly started speaking nonsense. Something about how they went to war with humans before but lost." Thales put on a frightened expression.

'Connect part of the real incident to the truth Morat knows. That way, I can avoid the "human lie-detector" from detecting my lies.'

"And then he went crazy. He wanted to knead me into a ball!" Thales trembled and shivered.

"Child, it's okay. You are safe now. And then, what happened?" Morat looked at him comfortingly and encouraged the boy to continue.

"I felt really scared and uncomfortable. I couldn't breathe." Thales' memory returned to that night in Red Street Market. It was as though he was experiencing that suffocating feeling again. It felt extremely real.

Morat felt Thales' emotions. 'Up until now, he did not lie. Having gone through something like that and surviving from the hands of that calamity wasn't easy for this child.'

Thales cowered and hugged his body with his arms.

"In the end, I could faintly hear him say that he found someone who 'lost control'. And that after the Battle of Eradication, their numbers became smaller and smaller."

Morat's expression finally became solemn.

'Lost control? Looks like that newborn Mystic was still at the first stage and had not...'

The Black Prophet asked grimly, "Who? Child, did he say who that person who 'lost control' was?"

Thales shook his head while trembling, "That strange man did not say who it was... He only proudly said that he will guide that person, and that the person won't be able to reject him! And then Yodel appeared and pierced him with a sword."

Morat exhaled. The crazy look of a proud and smug lunatic who was talking to himself before killing someone appeared before his eyes.

'Looks like Yodel wasn't hiding anything.' Morat huffed. His ugly, wrinkly face twitched slightly.

On the other hand, Thales exhaled lightly. 'Part of it was the truth... Looks like I managed to muddle through. No, the acting has to continue.'

Thales added, trembling. "But Yodel said that he wouldn't die and will come back in ten or more years. Lord Hansen, they say that you are the most knowledgeable. Is this true? Will that strange person come back?"

Morat was burdened by his thoughts. He nodded perfunctorily. "Yes, the Supreme Sword is not perfect and can only seal Mystics for a short amount of time. But please do not worry, the Kingdom's Secret Intelligence Department will not let him come near you." The Black Prophet furrowed his brows. His thoughts had already flown outside Mindis Hall.

'Tonight's goals have been achieved.'

'One, I confirmed the news regarding the Air Mystic with Yodel, and even got an extra reward—the existence of a newborn Mystic.'

'Two, I saw Constellation's future heir with my own eyes.

'Three, I left him a deep impression worth remembering forever at this age.'

Morat bowed deeply. When he raised his head, his gaze was already earnest and serious. "Thank you for your honesty and cooperation. Please be well-prepared."

'Be well-prepared?'

Thales was a little confused.

Morat looked profoundly at him and nodded. "The exact time is a little hard to grasp, but I have a premonition that it is near."

His cold and raspy yet old and solemn voice echoed within the noble banquet hall. "Your Highness."

The transmigrator opened his mouth wide and his whole body trembled.

'Your... Your Highness?... This status... '

However, Morat had no intention of explaining his words. He flicked his black robe and turned to leave.

Thud! Thud! Thud! the sound of his cane tapping on floor rang rhythmically in the air.

Thales finally snapped out of his daze.

He stood up from the chair and cried loudly at the Black Prophet's retreating figure, "Wait! Lord Hansen! The information about the three children in XC District and that bartender..."

"They are still alive. It seems like someone in the Brotherhood is sheltering them," Morat spoke, neither stopping nor turning his head back. He had something else more important to do.

"But, can you tell me—" Thales ran two steps forward and spoke anxiously. He wanted to know more details. "All of them are my friends—"

"Boy!" Morat suddenly raised his voice, shocking Thales so much that he came to a stop. "You are not the king, and are not even the prince yet, heir of Jadestar!"

"Wait until you become Constellation's heir and become powerful enough, then you can talk about protecting them, or else, these past attachments will one day become your weaknesses." As the Black Prophet approached the door, his raspy voice rang. It seemed to be full of... indignation?

"And my sixty years of experience in the Secret Intelligence Department tells me that the only way to prevent your enemies from detecting your weaknesses..." Morat stopped and turned his head back, flashing a hideous smile. Thales felt a surge of coldness in his heart.

Morat slowly raised his hand and lightly clenched his fist while showing off a smiling face full of wrinkles. "Is to take every single weakness you have and destroy them entirely. Do you understand, the not yet... Prince Thales?"

Thales looked at him in a daze. Morat turned again and tapped the door.

The guards outside opened the door together and revealed Gilbert and Jines' anxious figures, whereas the Masked Protector stood alone on the other side.

The former two looked over anxiously. Jines even ignored Morat and took brisk, large strides across the antechamber towards Thales.

Morat chuckled as he spoke, tapping his cane on the floor. "Do not worry, the three of you. Constellation has an outstanding heir. One day, the Kingdom's Secret Intelligence Department will become his backbone and be of his service."

Gilbert furrowed his brows and watched as the Black Prophet limped past him.

At this moment, Thales suddenly spoke when he entered the hall, "Lord Hansen! How about you? Have you destroyed your weaknesses?"

Morat was stunned. He raised his head and looked at the little boy, who was on the other side of the hall.

At that moment, Thales suddenly felt a surge of strange emotions that he could not decipher passing through the unreasonable Black Prophet.

Under everyone's gaze, the Black Prophet, Morat Hansen, said with certainty, "Of course. Entirely. Not even one is left."

And then he left Mindis Hall.

Only Yodel clenched his fists tightly without anyone seeing it as he stood by the side.

"Madan Jines and Sir Gilbert, I am alright!" Thales shook his head while smiling at Jines and Gilbert, who were anxiously enquiring him about his condition. He then turned towards Yodel and spoke seriously, "In fact, there's something that I need to do first."

Gilbert furrowed his brows and Jines looked at Thales with a surprised gaze. The little boy extended his hand towards the Masked Protector who was about to leave.

Thales spoke firmly, "Yodel! I need your protection! Please escort me to Madam Serena Corleone's room."

...

"No heir? Coming from you, who only has a daughter, these words are quite appropriate." King Kessel propped both of his arms on the table and exhaled lightly.

Val also spoke with a hostile tone. It was filled with the unique bluntness and crudeness only found in warriors. "I traveled for two days and two nights, and I arrived almost only a few minutes slower than the messenger raven. I did not do so for us to mock each other, Kel. Although I, too, really want to see you fall off that damned throne."

"If the worst happens, how are your preparations in the North?" Kessel did not take heed of Val's tone. He lowered his head and ran his finger on the map of the Western Peninsula on the long table.

"Broken Dragon Fortress has entered a critical situation." Duke Arunde took off his chain glove and threw it on the table. "However, Sonia emphasized many times that the three hundred regular troops of the monarch, and the five hundred militias recruited locally are not enough to deal with that Great Dragon's fury at all... She needs reinforcements."

"How many?"

"Based on the military potential of the three archdukes in the southern part of Eckstedt, she needs at least eight thousand more well-equipped and well-trained soldiers to ensure that the fortress will not be lost. If road safety from the Northern Territory to Central Territory is to be ensured, fifteen thousand people are needed. Also, there needs to be one thousand cavaliers who are proficient in riding to guarantee adaptability outside the city's defenses. Heavy cavalry would be best, but light cavalry is fine too."

As Val spoke, Kessel furrowed his brows.

"I know that it's a bit of an exorbitant demand, but you have to admit that she makes quite some sense. Broken Dragon Fortress had already fallen once, and Eckstedt is better than us in fighting during the winter. Over the past few years, the three archdukes of the territories who are right next to the borders of our kingdom have been continuously enlarging their army."

"The night before I departed, I called together all the vassals under me. Within ten days, they would be leading soldiers to continuously reinforce the borders. If we add the forces directly under me, we have at least five thousand soldiers, including three hundred cavaliers. Of course, I do not guarantee their quality." Val took off his other glove and warmed his hand on the Everlasting Lamp.

Kessel quietly got up and walked to the window. Looking down from the towering Renaissance Palace, a myriad of twinkling lights under the darkness of the capital city could be seen. "It is not just these three archdukes. Ever since the 'Fortress Treaty' was enforced, all the archdukes have been aiming for the things from North Harbor's Eternal Oil to the Crystal Drop Mines in the three counties in the southern banks, and they have been waiting for this day for a very long time. Moreover... it involves the heir of the Cloud Dragon Spear."

"That is why this can't be avoided anymore. Kel, dispatch your messenger and, at the same time, sharpen your long sword." Val, the Castellan of Cold Castle who acted like a warrior more than a noble, rubbed his cold, red hands together and spoke through clenched teeth.

Kessel the Fifth's gaze was profound. His sky-blue irises reflected the nightscape of the capital city. "So, was that sentence really left at the scene? 'The empire shall last, so long as the stars remain'?"

"Yes, that passionate, damned motto of your family. Although I sealed the news, you know how capable the Secret Room is. I imagine that the moment King Nuven receives the news, he will, at least on the surface, start mobilizing his troops and promoting his vassals. Otherwise, he would not be able to pacify his feudal lords. Looking at the military potential of all of Eckstedt..."

Duke Val Arunde snorted coldly and removed his hands from the lamp. He had a displeased expression. "I suggest that you first call together all the direct vassals of Central Hill, and then prepare to summon all the great feudal lords. Even the Seucader Family located far away in the Southern Pacific Islands must be mobilized. Once war breaks out, call all our allies—from Sacred Tree Kingdom and Sera Dukedom, to Steel City and the Alliance of Freedom, and even Mane et Nox in the Eastern Peninsula—into action."

Kessel looked at the nightscape of the capital city outside the window and clenched his fists lightly. "But we are far from taking our last step. King Nuven is not a hot-headed young man either."

The Duke of Northern Territory was filled with rage. He slammed his hand on the surface of the table. "Do you think there's still a chance for the matter to be resolved peacefully? You know that the problem is far more than just that sentence! There are people hoping for it to happen on both sides, that's why this mother*ck*ng problem happened!"

Both of them were silent for a while.

Kel snorted softly and lowered his head, inhaling a lungful of the winter air. "Hmph. If Midier was still around, what do you suppose he would do?"

The completely unreserved Val stood up furiously. "Why can't I communicate with you? Or did you become stupid after sitting on that throne? This is not the time to cherish the memory of your saintly brother, Kel! Our kingdom, our land, and our people are facing the threat of war!"

"Why do you think I rushed back here? You know how much I despise you! However, there is a pledge to be fulfilled and honor to be upheld. When you and Constellation are in trouble, the whole Northern Territory will stand behind you. This time, we will stand in front of you!"

Kessel stared at Val—the companion who grew up with him—and did not move at all.

"I already came back and am right in front of you! I heard that the Cullen Family's old Treasured Sword is also recuperating in Eternal Star city. The young fellow from the Covendier Family lives nearby and the Nanchester Family's One-Eyed Dragon will be able to reach here in a day from Steep Forest City. Only the Fakenhaz and the Tabark Families who stay in the Ruins and Blade City are further away and need to be summoned by urgent order. Once you're done dealing with the six of us, every single one of the Thirteen Distinguished Families will also come."

With rounded eyes, Val glared furiously at the supreme king. "It's time, Kel. Issue the Constellation's Edict for Assembly. The nineteen noble families will gather once more in the capital city and fight for you and for Constellation."

Chapter 49

You Will Be Better Than Him

That night, the Four Main City Gates of Eternal Star City were not closed.

"Warrant from the king! Make way! Make way!" More than ten knights rode out of the city gates with solemn expressions while holding both the nine-pointed-star flag, and another flag with two cross-shaped stars on it.

"Are these all the messengers?" At the Northern City Gate, the captain of the city defense team watched with a solemn expression as the messengers left.

The city defense officer who had rushed over shook his head. He said, "Not all. There are three other city gates."

The city defense officer knew what was going as he thought, 'The messengers were holding warrants from Renaissance Palace and were going to where the various great personage are located respectively. This is nothing, there are a greater amount of messenger ravens who are sent to nobles living even further away.'

"Something major is happening," the nearly fifty city defense officer tapped his team leader's shoulder and spoke softly.

'Hopefully, this won't be another Bloody Year.'

...

After firmly refusing Gilbert and Jines' company ("I apologize, Sir Gilbert and Madam Jines, but this is an alliance between her and myself—I must face it alone. I promise to inform you of the content of our conversation."—Thales, who shook his head firmly) Thales quietly walked beside Yodel.

In the first few minutes, both of them did not speak.

Only after turning past a corner and having the guard nearest to them separate from them behind the wall, Thales stood still silently and looked towards the Masked

Protector.

Then Yodel's footsteps stopped.

"We have to discuss some matters in private." Thales exhaled deeply.

Yodel went in front of him and quietly kneeled down.

"As you wish," the masked secret protector said and lightly held Thales' shoulders.

The next moment, it felt as though an odd ripple spread out. Everything around Thales and Yodel became a strange white color.

It was like another world.

"The Path of Shadows." Yodel explained briefly.

Thales nodded. However, his expression was still somber and he was not fascinated by the strange, pure white background before him. He had something more important to do.

Both of them were silent for a while.

Thales constructed his words with difficulty and spoke with considerable effort, "Yodel, how... how much do you know about what happened between me... and the Air Mystic?"

Yodel did not say anything as usual. He only lowered his head slightly and looked towards the black-haired, gray-eyed boy.

"When Morat wanted to talk to me privately in the study room, you intentionally stopped him." Thales shut his eyes and dully recounted the events chronologically.

"You knew that the study room on the second floor has a unique soundproof system and will cut off the Blood Clansmen' hearing and transmission of messages. That was why you insisted that we stayed on the first floor to talk so that you could seek Serena's help, have her relay an incredibly important reminder to me without Morat realizing it... so that I can outsmart Morat's vicious interrogation and conceal..." Thales paused.

He slowly opened his eyes and looked at the purple mask. In the end, he firmly said,

“...Conceal my true identity. Is that right?”

Thales gazed fixedly at the royal family's secret protector. The mask was turned towards him and remained still.

After another period of silence that could not be defined by words, Yodel lowered his gaze slightly. His low and raspy voice then rang from behind his dark-purple mask.

Under Thales' complicated gaze, the Masked Protected spoke in a deep voice, "I... am not like Gilbert... I am not good with words. After the Red Street Market incident, I did not know how to speak about the topic either."

Thales looked at him with a sparkling gaze. "But you knew from the beginning."

Yodel's voice was laden with a heavy burden as he said, "Yes. That night, I was there all along... I heard what the Mystic said. I also noticed your... peculiarity—your abnormal state when facing the Mystic, the vase in the corridor that cracked for no reason, and the underground explosion at Vine Manor... So, I know that you are..."

Thales took a deep breath. "Then, my father..."

"Only me, young Sir, I am the only one who knows..."

Yodel did not speak anymore.

Thales stared dazedly at this strange person who had always protected him and always hid his face behind his mysterious mask.

'Yes, he knew all along, but he chose to keep the secret for me.'

The transmigrator could hear his own voice hitching slightly. It was full of surprised disbelief as he spoke, "Why? You know that I am... those calamities. You know what sort of tabooed existences those calamities are... why do you still..."

Yodel grasped Thales' shoulders slowly and cut off his thoughts.

"Child," he said in a rasp, "I have seen... a lot of things. A little more than what you imagine."

He continued softly, "Ever since the day this Kingdom and your family were born, they

were doomed to be... entangled with those calamities. It was that way over six hundred years ago.

"It was the same way twelve years ago."

Thales heart trembled. 'Twelve years ago? The Jadestar family that... is entangled with calamities?'

"It is also that way now. I have seen those calamities on more than one occasion. I have a feeling that... the thing that is truly scary and terrifying is not the calamities, but ourselves.

"It is how much normal people like us would degenerate, fall into decadence, and sacrifice our principles because of the existence of those so-called calamities."

Yodel paused for a while, as if contemplating his next words.

"I know that perhaps, you are a 'calamity'." This was the first time the Masked Protector, who was silent all the while, say so much in front of him.

He continued speaking hesitantly, "However, I know that many people in this country... they have already become uglier and scarier than those calamities.

"They have already brought about disaster, but are not aware of it."

Thales furrowed his brows in a bizarre fashion and asked, "Such as Morat?"

"He is just one of them. The Black Prophet has long since ceased to be a prophet, he only has darkness left."

Yodel raised his head. His dark-colored glass lenses reflected the pale white color of their surroundings. Thales stood alone in that image reflected on the lenses, and he looked thin and miserable.

"Compared to him, Sir Thales, I am more willing to believe in you."

Yodel seemed like he had not spoken this much in a long time. However, the awkward manner of him trying hard to find the right words, and the sincerity behind his actions made Thales' feelings complicated.

At that moment, the transmigrator did not know what type of facial expression and mentality he should use to face the secret protector.

Thales inhaled deeply for a few seconds and asked again, "But why me? Just because I have the Jadestar blood in me?"

Yodel slowly shook his head. "I am not Gilbert, and what I believe in is not the alleged bloodline. I believe that a seven-year-old boy, who protected his friends with all his might under a hopeless situation, is a different existence from those ugly people.

"I am also willing to believe that you, a Jadestar with humble beginnings... will become an extraordinary king in this decadent kingdom."

'An extraordinary king?'

Thales instinctively spoke, "Just like crown prince Midier, my eldest uncle?"

Yodel was silent for a few seconds.

"No," the masked protector answered. His voice was deep and filled with grief. He spoke firmly with his raspy voice, "You will be better than him. I know that you have within yourself something he does not."

Thales trembled slightly. His breathing quickened.

Looking at Yodel, whose expression could not be read, he found that he could not speak for a long time.

After a long while.

"Thank you." Thales, who finally calmed his state of mind, could only utter these two words. The usually articulate Thales was promptly at a loss for words.

The kneeling Masked Protector nodded heavily with force.

Yodel spoke again. This time, his words seemed even more sincere.

"Yodel Cato, at your service."

Thales sucked in a deep breath. He did not speak for quite a while.

Then, he heard himself asking with difficulty, "One more thing. If you were there all along that night... Since when were you... there?"

Yodel's hands pushed down on Thales' shoulders slightly.

The sounds of Thales' light pants could be heard before he spoke slowly.

"Did you see, see Quide in..." Thales clenched his teeth and asked in a trembling voice, "...the Abandoned Houses?"

The Masked Protector relaxed his grip slightly. He did not speak.

He simply did not speak.

At that moment, Thales only felt that Yodel's mask and the pair of lenses on it were ice-cold. It was as though a deluge of coldness suddenly coursed through his heart.

Trembling, Thales asked, "You didn't stop him. Even when he entered our house... you didn't stop him... Why? The prince... might have been among the child beggars, right?"

"And... those children..."

In truth, Thales already made his guess a long time ago. But he was unsure...

He had to ask.

Yodel slowly stood up and cut him off.

He said plainly, "We should go. They will be suspicious of us."

At that moment, the Masked Protector was like an emotionless robot. This made Thales recall Asda's smile.

It had no warmth.

.....

Although Serena's room was not one hundred meters away as what Jines had said, it was not as near as he imagined it would be.

The Blood Clansmen' guest rooms were situated in Mindis Hall's spacious storage cellar, away from the sunlight, the people, and Thales.

"Good evening, Sir Thales." The pale-faced Blood Clan member, Chris Corleone—who had lived for an unknown amount of years and months—bowed slightly at the 'entrance' of the room. He flashed a smile at Yodel, a smile that seemed to belong to the dead.

"Welcome back, Masked Esquire. Your sudden appearance just now really scared all of us."

Yodel did not respond.

Chris was not bothered by it. He turned towards Thales and nodded softly. "Her Highness is waiting for your arrival."

Thales, whose emotions were perturbed and complicated, raised his head and looked at Yodel standing beside him.

The latter nodded almost imperceptibly behind his mask and walked out of the door. He stood at the entrance together with Chris, like doormen.

The transmigator also nodded slightly. After inhaling deeply, he pushed open the room door and walked towards Serena, who was already waiting inside.

The one who saved his life just now...

And was the next trouble to be handled after Morat.

"Ah, my long-awaited allwy."

The red-eyed loli's expression was profound. She lifted the hem of her black dress and curtsied at him.

"It seems that under my ASSISTANCE," the lisping Serena emphasized the word 'assistance' and continued talking with an unsettling smile, "You have aweady gotten out of twouble.

"Isn't it now time to discuss our issue of remuneration and repayment?"

Chapter 50

Donate a Bag of Blood and Save a Life

Serena had been waiting in her so-called 'room'.

Apart from two Eternal Lamps, the place was dark. Thales suspected that even those two lamps were lit for him.

Rolana and Istrone were nowhere to be seen.

The extremely huge, black coffin was still behind the red-eyed little loli. If Thales had not seen the Blood Clansmen fiddle with a switch and fold it into the size of a normal coffin, he would have suspected that the Blood Clansmen had an alleged 'magician' transport it.

However, at the moment, looking at the black coffin, Thales furrowed his brows.

"What's wong?" Serena asked, bewildered.

"Not much," Thales said plainly and put on his usual facial expression. He wanted to ask why she put a toilet bowl in the middle of the room but swallowed it back.

"I am here to thank my ally for her assistance, Serene... can I call you that?"

Serena raised her brows imperceptibly and pouted.

'Just providing assistance, just my obligation as an ally and not help given in expectation for your repayment? Such a cunning and eloquent boy,' Serena thought resentfully.

Serena tilted her head and flashed a cute loli smile, "I only transmitted a few perpwexing sentences—I would pwefer that you call me Madam Serena—and got hold of some dirty wittle secret at the same time. In the words of those in Mane et Nox, why wouldn't I be glwad to do it? Especially with the fact that my dear ally is shadiwy welated to Mystics?"

The two of them were silent for a moment.

Thales thought, 'She is indeed an old witch. She won't let this opportunity slide.'

"No, your help was very important to me, and I am very grateful towards you." Thales smiled shyly with a sincere gaze like a grateful little boy.

"Otherwise, in front of the Black Prophet, I might even make confessions regarding Corleone family's internal rift and the truth of all of you seeking asylum in Constellation. He is the Black Prophet. Who knows what terrifying things he would do after knowing these secrets?

"I definitely don't want to see bad things happening to my ally, I hope you are thinking the same way, Serene."

Serena's gaze immediately became cold.

She put on a deliberate smile and revealed her little fangs at the same time. "You are not willing to be at a disadvantage at all, are you, my ally? And do not call me Sewene."

'This tactic can't scare me anymore now.' Amused, Thales looked at Serena, who looked like she was five or six and was curving her mouth.

Thales' smile became even brighter. He took a step forward and said, "I thought that allies should trust each other instead of threaten each other. Our interests align, my dear Serene."

"Since our interwests are aligned, please call me Madam Sewena and please show more sincerity. For example, my followers and I need more bwood. Fresh bwood." Serena's red pupils gained focus. She also took one step forward and gazed at Thales.

'As expected, dogs can't change their... Ahem.'

Thales inhaled deeply and took a step forward, staring straight into the pair of red eyes and tried to erase his previous impression of Serena as a mummy from his mind. He smiled and said, "For living people's fresh blood, it's a little hard. But this time, I came to fulfil my part in our alliance to further strengthen our common interests, Serene."

'Serene? What a rude mortal!' Serena thought a little angrily. 'Wait till I snatch back

the crown from that b*tch... '

She glared at Thales' carefree smile.

Serena chuckled softly and curled up the corner of her tiny lips slightly. Then, she said, "Hmph, so, you finally decided to ask for my hand in marriage?"

'Wha—'

Thales' worldview shook slightly.

With an expression akin to someone who just ate shit, he looked at the smugly smiling four-hundred-year-old witch in resignation.

'You win'.

Thales heaved a sigh. Under Serena's sparkling gaze, he rolled up his left sleeve and extended his bare wrist towards the red-eyed loli.

"My fresh blood... this was what I promised as part of our alliance," he said plainly.

Serena immediately flashed a smile and said, "I now believe in your sincerity, my dear ally."

The Archduchess shut her eyes and exhaled deeply. The curve of her lips became increasingly wider. 'I thought he would keep going back on his word. This boy isn't that detestable after all.'

Thales' gaze was solemn. His breathing quickened and he said, "Remember, one-eighth of a pint, Serene. No more than that."

Serena opened her eyes, ignoring what Thales had called her. She then flashed a strange smile. "No lesser than that either. I will control the blood volume."

Serena put on a fascinated and passionate expression. At that moment, the fearful Thales finally felt that he was facing a four or five-hundred-year old Blood Clan Archduchess.

'Blood volume? Can she use another term?'

Looking at Serena, who had transformed herself into a gastronomist, Thales gulped with much difficulty. He could not shake off his 'mummy-related' trauma from before.

"Eh, can your gaze be a little bit gentler... Your expression is making me a little scared, my heart feels weird... Ah- Give me a signal, big sister. Don't just suddenly bite me with your big, bloody mouth!

"Ack! Ouch- Ouch- Ouch!"

Thales' flurried voice rang within the room.

Yodel's mask trembled. He was about to move when the old Blood Clan Butler stopped him.

"This is an alliance between them," Chris said coldly, looking at the Masked Protector without any impression of weakness.

'In the face of the Blood Clansmen' fangs, humans would always be at a disadvantage. Even if that little brat- that child is the future heir of the second strongest Kingdom in the Western Peninsula.'

However, as she continued drinking his blood...

Something did not... seem right?'

Thales' voice rang from within the black coffin again.

"Your mouth... it looks pretty small. Why does it have so much strength... Eh, don't be too vigorous at the start. There must be a transition... Ouch, teeth! It's hurting me! Ah... slower, mouthful by mouthful... Softer... yes, you must be gentle...

"Tongue... ah... don't put your tongue everywhere... I won't be able to take it..."

Chris' face became more and more unpleasant.

"Alright, keep it at this pace. Little mouthful by little mouthful... I know that you have trouble holding it in... But you must resist it, and remain rational. Serene, be good. For the sake of my health, you cannot be so fast..."

Chris' face started to turn from white to green.

'That damned mortal. That little brat. Is he deliberately doing this?'

He glared fiercely at Yodel standing across him. Yodel's hands stilled for a moment in midair.

As Chris' face twitched, he saw Yodel extend his hands outwards and make a gesture as if he was saying that there was nothing he could do about it.

The Masked Protector said helplessly in a rasp, "True. This is an alliance between them."

Relaxed, Yodel went back to the entrance and put his hands behind his back again.

Before Chris went crazy and dashed into the room, Serena finally had enough blood. She let go of the nervous looking Thales in satisfaction and licked her blood-red lips.

"Thank you for your hospitality," the red-eyed loli said sweetly.

"You're welcome," the extremely pale-faced Thales said. He sat on the floor in annoyance and massaged the two little holes on his wrist. His mouth opened and closed before he continued speaking, "Donate a bag of blood and save a life."

He kept feeling that she sneakily drank a lot more than she was supposed to.

.....

"Do not worry. That child is stronger than what we have imagined." Gilbert went into the hall on the second floor and stared at Jines, who was deep in thought.

At this moment, the sounds of horses galloping echoed from outside Mindis Hall.

Gilbert's expression changed. 'That is a messenger on horseback.'

"Seems like an eventful night indeed." Jines snapped back to attention and watched with a complicated gaze as the messenger respectfully handed her a sealed scroll bearing a nine-pointed star stamp.

Gilbert broke the seal and unrolled the scroll. His face became increasingly grimmer.

Gilbert put the scroll down and frowned deeply, then said, "Something major has

happened. His Majesty urgently calls for us to head to the palace."

"Of course. After all, you are his most trusted attendant and former Foreign Affairs Minister." Jines heaved a sigh and turned nonchalantly, walking upstairs.

"As for me, forget about it. I would rather stay here and look after the child."

"No." Gilbert turned towards Jines. His countenance was more solemn than any other time before. Looking at Jines, then held up the top part of the scroll and shook it slightly.

At the end of the paper was Kessel Jadestar's signature and the nine-pointed-star signet.

"His Majesty urgently calls for all of us to head to the Renaissance Palace immediately..."

"...With the child."

Chapter 51

Thales and Zayen (One)

When Thales was invited out of Mindis Hall by Gilbert and Jines, both had solemn expressions on their faces, he had no idea what was occurring.

"What happened?" For the first time in over twenty days, Thales stepped out of Mindis Hall's cedar wood door. Looking at the familiar dark-colored carriage, his face was filled with bewilderment.

"Gilbert will explain it to you." Jines' unsmiling face made him nervous. She swung the whip in her hand and gracefully leaped onto the driver's seat. Her answer was short and simple. "What you need to do now is to get on the carriage immediately."

With his mind in a muddled state, Thales turned his head back. The middle-aged noble produced a boarding stool out of nowhere and softly put it on the ground.

"Please get in, young Sir. Madam Jines does not like sitting in the carriage. My apologies, you will have to bear sitting with an old man like me." Gilbert's effort in attempting to be humorous was a complete failure. Even the two horses could tell that he was gloomy with worry and deliberately avoided them.

'What... is happening?'

Filled with anxiety and fear, Thales stepped onto the boarding stool and then the carriage pedal. He turned his head back and glanced at Mindis Hall's guards, only to see that they showed no signs of leaving with him. As if they had sensed Thales' gaze, the swordsmen lowered their heads respectfully, with Chora in the lead.

"They won't come with us... One carriage will give us more of a low profile," Gilbert stated flatly.

Thales looked at the two people's incredibly grave faces and quelled the desire to get to the bottom of it. He only asked one question, "Will we... come back after we go to the palace?"

Gilbert's voice was slightly grim. "It depends on His Majesty's will. Please pardon my rudeness, but we must hurry."

'Matters are that serious?'

Thales no longer said anything else. He sat in the carriage, and Gilbert, who entered right after him, closed the door lightly.

The dark coach was still the same as around twenty days ago. The interior was still filled with those dark red couches, the glass adorned with Crystal Drops, the crest of the nine-pointed star decorating the walls of the carriage, and that faintly glimmering fluorescent paint.

Jines' whip struck the horses lightly and rhythmically, but the speed of the carriage was much faster compared to the previous time Gilbert drove it. Of course, it was also a much bumpier ride.

As the carriage jerked around, Gilbert looked at Mindis Hall, under the moonlight, and slowly disappearing from the window, then he looked at Thales solemnly.

"We are in a hurry, so I will choose what is important to tell you."

Aside from the time when they spoke in the secret chamber, Thales had never seen Gilbert so serious before. This made him apprehensive.

"Eckstedt Diplomat Group is scheduled to visit Constellation after New Year." The middle-aged noble looked at Thales seriously.

Thales narrowed his eyes and tried his hardest to remember the history of the continents from twenty something days ago.

'Eckstedt, the country that was built in the north by the humans' hero during the Battle of Eradication, Raikaru Eckstedt. Great Dragon of the North, the Heroes' Country, Western Peninsula's Blade, Constellations powerful neighbor to the north.'

Gilbert continued speaking seriously, "The Northern Territory has sent urgent news: Three days ago, Eckstedt Diplomat Group... has been completely wiped off when they were on the road in Central Hill, located to the south. There were no survivors."

Thales widened his eyes in disbelief.

Gilbert sighed. "The victims include six Eckstedt nobles... and Prince Moriah Walton. He is the only son of Nuven the Seventh, who is the King of Eckstedt and also the archduke of Dragon Clouds City. Prince Moriah is the Walton Family heir and the next Archduke of Dragon Clouds City."

The transmigrator sucked in a cold breath.

The king's only son in the strongest country in the Western Peninsula and the heir of their neighboring land...

...was killed within Constellation's territory?

"No one survived, including the nobles of Constellation who accompanied them. There are no clues. The only thing they found were a string of words formed when the victims' blood was poured on the ground..."

Gilbert looked into Thales' eyes and, with worry on his face, he nodded lightly and said, "'The Empire shall last, so long as the stars remain'."

'Jadestar Family's motto?'

Thales was momentarily stunned.

"This method is clearly just a bad, childish way of transferring blame and causing strife between two countries..." Thales thought about the nature of this matter, and he suddenly realized something. With disbelief, he lifted his head and asked, "Is it truly effective?"

"Unfortunately... It is effective and very bad," Gilbert answered in a low tone.

'Very bad?' Thales heart was filled with apprehension.

The carriage charged into Twilight District, entered King's Street, and headed towards the Central Region.

King's Street was one of the largest streets in Eternal Star City. The population there was only second to Central Region, which used its northern territory as a transport hub. King's Street had the Star Plaza where merchants from various countries set up shop, and a grand bazaar located to the side of Western City Gate, where the low-class citizens gather.

Compared to XC District and Western District, which still had their streets lit by torches and animal fat, the King's Street was lit with Everlasting Lamps that were just slightly inferior to the ones used in Eastern City District. More pedestrians gradually appeared, these people ranged from bards performing on the streets, to merchants shouting from their shops (some of the shops that still operated at night, such as boutiques and watch shops, were still open), to servants who were rushing about on errands from their masters, to officials who were engaged in social activities, to even true nobles, riding in carriages or even walking down the streets.

There, their carriage was not in the slightest bit eye-catching.

The King's Street was located right at the intersection between Twilight District and Central Region. The ratio of the wealthy and the distinguished there was incredibly high. Compared to the Star Plaza and the grand bazaar that Thales had seen before, this place was clearly more reserved and quiet. It lacked the loud noises and bustle of activity, along with the crude and vulgar atmosphere the latter possessed as a local market. However, even in this place, beggars in rags and homeless people were occasionally seen on both sides of the road stretching out their hands to passers-by while moaning.

Fortunately, the carriage had a one-way mirror, and those outside cannot notice the actions within the carriage.

However, Thales' mind was on Gilbert's words at that moment. He only cast a quick glance at the sights in the streets. The Foreign Affairs Minister's words continued travelling into his ears. "The key lies in the 'Fortress Treaty'.

"At the end of the Bloody Year, Eckstedt invaded our land. Broken Dragon Fortress fell into enemy hands. Then, from the Northern Territory, Land of Cliffs, Western Desert, to the Eastern Sea, most of Constellation was invaded by the flames of war. We had few soldiers, and our generals were weak. The Kingdom was almost losing all hope. His Majesty, who had just succeeded the throne, even thought about enlisting children below fourteen into the army."

Gilbert exhaled a long breath. There was a dazed look in his eyes, as if he was thinking about the events in the past. "Based on the fear of all the other countries in the Western Peninsula and the attention by the Eastern Peninsula's Mane et Nox and Hanbol towards the affairs within the Western Peninsula, the Foreign Affairs Department mediated between countries with everything that we had to have other

countries interfere in this matter.

"In the end, we forced Eckstedt's soldiers to retreat the way they came. They signed the contract, and Eckstedt was even forced to relinquish a barren piece of land they occupied before the Bloody Year, which belonged to Constellation in the past.

"I was the signatory for the 'Fortress Treaty', I would know this like the back of my hand."

Thales' eyes brightened up. "We lost the war, but won the negotiations?"

Gilbert nodded, but there was not a hint of relaxation on his face. "This is the horrible part—instead of saying that this is an agreement, it would be more accurate to say that it is a record of humiliation."

The carriage moved forward a little more. A number of beggars appeared on the road. Some of them even stretched out their hands towards Jines, who was driving the carriage, but the female official wore a cold expression on her face and ignored all of them. She struck the horses with her whip even faster.

"At the moment when you have won many battles and when you are just a hand's reach from land and riches, you are forced to withdraw your soldiers and even give up your land due to the cooperation of various countries. This sort of failure is even more humiliating compared to losing a war...

"Many of the suzerains, especially the archdukes in the south and who shared borders with Constellation, were furious, to the point where the 'Contract' had even shaken King Nuven's rule.

"During these ten years, the Great Dragon's relationship with Constellation had always been chilly. And now, with Northern Territory discovering a large Crystal Drop mine and Eastern Sea having deep sea whales that contain a lot of oil..."

Gilbert sighed.

Thales whispered in his heart, 'Eckstedt, a country that is still being formed with a nation that is still building their own culture... A country that became unified through the hardships of battle.'

"Eckstedt's suzerains, or at least the three archdukes that share their borders with us,

have always been eager for battle... They long for the large mass of land, resources, and riches that had been within hand's reach twelve years ago but in the end, were a missed opportunity."

Gilbert shook his head and looked out the window. Grief appeared in his eyes. "That's why the Eckstedt Diplomat Group visited our country. They're determined to restructure the 'Fortress Treaty' and rebuild the borders of the two countries.

"Yet now, before the diplomat group reached Eternal Star City, they were killed midway... Can you imagine the situation that will occur in Eckstedt when the news returns to them?"

The carriage ran over a bumpy road, and the entire coach jerked.

Thales frowned. "You think that Eckstedt's suzerains plotted this disaster? Just so that... they can incite war and snatch our land and our resources?"

Gilbert lifted his head. At that moment, his gaze was incredibly terrifying, and the former Foreign Affairs Minister stated coldly, "It's worse than that, Eckstedt's king selection system is where the great suzerains will vote and choose a king... Over the past several decades, the Walton Family has sat on the throne for two full generations... and Nuven the Seventh is definitely not some beauty that everyone loves."

Thales spoke with sudden realization, "So this is some of Eckstedt's suzerains' uniform desire to search for resources beyond their country and change their king?"

Gilbert took special care to guide the kingdom's only Jadestar Family kin and said lightly, "You're close, my young Sir. You just need to take one step further in your thoughts. Just one step further. During this period of time where the matter of the diplomat group being assassinated will cause an impact, the pressure of this matter will fall entirely on King Kessel's shoulders. No matter what decision we make, what sort of answer we give, whether we should fight or form an armistice, what method we would use to approach this matter, whether we should be aggressive or gentle, whether we should preserve our glory and be humiliated, everything will be on His Majesty's shoulders... Right from the start, all the nobles in Constellation will fix their gazes on Renaissance Palace."

"Are you saying that...?" Thales asked in a puzzled tone. No matter how much

intelligence he possessed, he was not well-versed in the nobles' rules, he did not understand the significance of this matter.

During that instant, Gilbert's eyes suddenly turned complicated and profound, causing Thales to be unable to decipher them.

"First of all, conducting this matter might be complicated, but it does not matter whether we fight or choose to form an armistice, His Majesty will not be able to escape from being criticized as a cold-hearted and ruthless king who disregards his people, oppresses the weak, and embarrasses Constellation. This will greatly impact His Majesty and Jadestar Family's reputation and influence in the kingdom."

Thales' pupils contracted. He can finally begin to understand the meaning behind why the situation was worse.

"Next, if he wants to handle this great matter, then His Majesty will need power that surpasses what is possessed in the territories directly under the royal family's name, be it in terms of military mobilization or national decisions. This means that... His Majesty must obtain the full support of all the suzerains, especially from the Six Great Clans and the thirteen Distinguished Families—this will definitely come at a price!"

Thales' heart shuddered. 'A price... Like, the next candidate for the Supreme of Constellation?'

"As such, there are pros and cons to battle. Not only will it bring about danger, it will also cause Constellation's influence of power to change... Once they go through the baptism of battle, the weak will be cast off, the old will lose their positions, the strong will live, and the living will become even stronger... Some of the suzerains will have death on their heads, and the other half will have new lives."

Under Gilbert's brightly burning eyes, Thales sat in the carriage with a dumbfounded expression as he felt the jerks and lurches of the carriage.

"Lastly, there are no children within the royal family. It has been twelve years since Constellation is without an heir." Gilbert's voice suddenly rose, "What danger lurking on the country's doorstep could possibly force His Majesty to select an heir ahead of time so that he could have a backup plan for the country due to possible war? In fact, what if a family with great reputation does an act that complies with public trust and gathers the support from small noble families? Who knows whether they would

become the next Jadestar and the next royal family?"

Silence...

Thales looked outside the window with glazed eyes. He understood what Gilbert meant. However, he had been shocked by the frightening truth that had required him exercise his mind vigorously for, he could not get over it even after a long time.

Gilbert saw his expression and shook his head lightly. 'Let's hope that this brutal and bloody game that has lasted for thousands of years will not scare off this intelligent and talented young man.'

After some time, Thales hoarsely spoke, "So, this isn't just Eckstedt's one-sided desire to fight and change their king. It is also the desire of many people in Constellation—to get rid of the royal family."

He added his conclusion with much difficulty, "The diplomat group's assassination... is something that happened because of the various political factors working together like when both ambitious parties in the two countries coordinate together..."

"Is that right." The last few words Thales uttered were a statement.

Gilbert looked at his condition worriedly. In his hesitation, he blinked, but he still said, "With the royal family's current situation, your existence and subsequent appearance to the public will make you a target whether it is in national or international terms—both represented by the suzerains in the country or Eckstedt, respectively. For the sake of your safety, I will suggest to His Majesty to postpone acknowledging your—"

"Is it worth it?" Thales did not bother with Gilbert's words. He spoke softly as he interrupted the middle-aged noble.

Gilbert lifted an eyebrow.

Thales asked powerlessly, "Just what sort of person would look forward so eagerly for war to come? This isn't some game of chess where we take each other's pieces and count our points by how many pieces we take."

Thales closed his eyes slowly and clenched his fists. "This is a war. There are living, breathing humans on both sides. They're standing right before each other, and they're taking each other's lives lawfully until one side completely dies... It's war.

"They've gone through the catastrophe that is the Bloody Year, why are people still eager for war? Just for a crown? To enjoy the feeling of having influence and power in your hands in a broken and decaying kingdom, in an infertile land with starving people, and among extremely numbed people? And then they will rule for twenty something years in great difficulty, bleakness, trepidation, and paranoia, before they forcefully pass this misfortune to their descendants?"

"Is it worth it?"

Gilbert wanted to answer, but he found himself at a loss for words for a time. Thales shook his head in low spirits as he did not obtain his answer.

However, this might be what history was—the history of human actions.

The coach fell into another round of silence.

The carriage left the bustling King's Street. More beggars appeared outside the carriage. Jines was forced to use the whip to scare them off.

Gilbert looked at his student with a worried expression and said softly, "This is not war. This is politics. We are all gamblers with 'winning power' as the goals in mind. Land and people are simply bargaining chips that we can use in the exchange. Winning and losing is simply the transfer of bargaining chips.

"This is the game between nobles and countries."

Thales lifted his gaze and giggled helplessly. "Yes, war is the continuation of politics—a Game of Thrones, a feast for the crows."

'But I don't like this.' Thales thought to himself in a quiet murmur.

The transmigrator shifted his peripheral vision to the view outside the carriage window. There, a beggar with a distressed look extended a hand, feeling the wheel axle.

Seeing this group of beggars in the capital, Thales contemplated, 'This kingdom is already in tatters- Wait!'

As the carriage passed a brightly burning Everlasting Lamp, Thales' eyes gained focus, and he instantly saw that beggar's hand clearly.

The pair of hands were rough and riddled with calluses.

But the calluses were not evenly distributed in the areas that he was used to seeing in the laborers or beggars' hands—which were at the areas where they usually used their palms to touch or carry heavy items. Instead, they were concentrated on the thumb and index finger, as well as near where the former and latter fingers connected.

The cogwheels in Thales' brain began turning.

He had seen the same unique calluses on someone else's hands before.

Jala Charleton.

Thales was stunned. He turned to another beggar, then the third, the fourth...

"Gilbert!"

The middle-aged noble looked over with a puzzled expression...

He could only hear Thales' quiet voice say, "Something's wrong, these are not beggars."

The transmigrator sucked in a deep breath.

"They... They are..."

Yodel's hoarse voice traveled faintly through the air and completed his sentence.
"...Assassins."

Chapter 52

Thales and Zayen (Two)

"White Eagle Family's reaction is faster than we have imagined—the Iron Eagle reached Eternal Star City two hours ago. This will give His Majesty a lot of time for prior preparation even before the news spreads." Zayen elegantly sat in a carriage that bore no crest and was driven by Knight Seychelles. He spoke those words with a cold countenance and looked outside the carriage window.

Another carriage with an equally mysterious identity stopped alongside them. The windows of both carriages were open to make it easier for their owners to converse.

"So what? No matter how fast a fish swims, it will not be able to avoid the current. This is a fated current His Majesty must face." A shrill voice rang from the other carriage.

"But there is a problem to our information," Zayen said coldly, "There is an unexpected, important personage in the diplomat group... the consequences are direr than we have imagined."

"You want to give up?"

Zayen paused for a moment and took a deep breath. "No, not at all. The plan will continue."

"There is no way to turn back now, is there?"

The shrill voice said nonchalantly, "Good, then. The general edict has already been issued. The nobles will be arriving one by one soon. During that time, Eckstedt's official response would probably have arrived—to mobilize the army, claim territory and threaten war. Guess how His Majesty would react? To swallow the humiliation for a greater cause, or to send our kingdom into hell with no regards for anything?"

"And to conduct something this major, all of you are really ruthless..."

Zayen lowered his head, sighed and then shook his head lightly. "Just like your family motto—'power from violence'. This is a necessary step. I must confirm your attitude

and stance—you kept refusing to participate in 'New Star', and this has made us very perplexed."

The other voice laughed loudly. "It seems like you are very confident in yourself! I cannot blame you for that. Think about this—for the young, elegant and well-mannered Zayen Covendier, the Mayor of Jade City and the Guardian Duke of South Coast, to be made heir by His Majesty! Such a marvelous scene!"

Zayen said in earnest sincerity, "We are willing to promise with our family's honor that your people's rule in the Western Desert will not be shaken by anyone. All of you might even benefit from the decay of the Northern Territory. And it is not necessarily myself... Constellation might also adopt the king selection system, is that not so?"

He spoke slowly and softly as he leaned forward slightly, "And as one of the six, you are bound to be a candidate."

A silence of more than ten seconds descended between the two carriages.

The shrill voice said slyly, "Very well, from this moment on, you have my assurance. If Constellation comes to that, without any accident, the Fakenhaz family will definitely become a force to be reckoned with."

Zayen softly clenched his fists. He suppressed the impatience in his heart. 'This man... Still unwilling to rashly place his bet.

'He can't be thinking that Fakenhaz has a chance, too? Or is he simply swinging to the other few families? Cullen? Nanchester? Or the very impossible Tabark?'

"I will remember it... Fakenhaz's stance," the Master of Tricolor Isis Flowers said plainly.

Even though Zayen kept his composure, he dreaded the person in the other carriage very much. In his list, this man's threat level was only behind the plump Guardian Duke of the Eastern Sea, and surpassed Nanchester's One-Eyed Dragon.

The shrill voice laughed loudly again and continued to speak, "I am greatly honored, Zayen, soon to be Your Majesty! I heard that lately, you have been deeply bothered by the matters of Blood Bottle Gang. Are you people not working together to control the gangs? The old man from the Cullen family is just standing idly like this?"

Having heard the words 'Your Majesty', Zayen frowned and pouted obscurely. "Thank you for your concern, everything is under control. This will be all for today, I still need to head to Renaissance Palace. As for you, you should be in the Ruins right now to personally receive His Majesty's edict."

"Do not concern yourself. Fakenhaz is never absent." The shrill voice suddenly became cold.

"Very well, Sir Fakenhaz. I look forward to seeing you again," Zayen uttered one last sentence.

The shrill voice laughed and said, "Yes. I look forward to it too, the reunion of the nineteen Noble Families in the capital city, after twelve years... haha."

The two carriages began moving respectively and went in opposite directions, going further and further away from each other.

Zayen lowered his head and shut his eyes, massaging his nose bridge gently.

Seychelles' voice rang from the front window. "Sir, something is wrong up ahead."

Zayen gently opened his eyes.

A distance away outside the carriage, intense and strange sharp sounds rang.

Seychelles let go of the whip with one hand and held the sword at his waist. He spoke coldly, "It seems like a carriage is being attacked by assassins."

.....

"Keep calm." Looking at the beggars on both sides of the street (whether lying down or standing), Gilbert leaned forward with an indifferent countenance and opened a little window in front of the coach. After hesitating for a moment, he softly spoke in a steady tone, "Madam Jines, there is an anomaly around us."

From the little window, Thales could clearly see that Jines' figure trembling.

She slowly spoke, "...Assassins? Coming for the child?"

For some reason, Thales could detect some unstable emotions from Jines' words. He

also noticed Gilbert looking worriedly at Jines' figure.

"...Might not be," the middle-aged noble said softly.

'Might not be?'

Thales checked for JC's dagger at his waist. Having heard this, he could not help but become panic-stricken.

'But even Yodel confirmed that they are assassins. Why is Gilbert telling Jines that it "might not be"?'

"Prepare to increase the speed and break away at any time. But before they really take action, Jines, you must keep calm! You must! Remember, they might not be assassins," the middle-aged noble spoke very solemnly. He seemed to realize that what he said to Jines did not sound quite right, and immediately added another sentence. "Yodel, you as well!"

"Are they coming for me?" Thales asked with a somber countenance.

Gilbert sat down, surveyed the carriage with a sharp gaze and softly said, "The situation is unclear for now. Theoretically, it is impossible for your existence and whereabouts to be divulged. But please prepare for the worst."

Even though he could not be seen, Yodel's raspy voice echoed strangely beside his ears. "At least seven of them. Skilled in hiding and well-trained, placed along the road leading to Renaissance Palace."

"I am prepared and will increase the speed anytime. Sit tight." Jines' voice rang, sending a chill down Thales' spine when he heard it.

"Jines, calm down!" Even Gilbert seemed a little off. He said these words to Jines solemnly.

At that moment, even the most inexperienced Thales could feel that something was not right with Jines. The carriage rounded a corner, traversing from mud road to brick road—they would be reaching the Central Region after two more turns.

Then...

An old beggar who was just groaning on the floor to their left suddenly changed his expression. He chased them on all fours and came up beside one of the horses. He extended his hands towards Jines and begged.

Crack!

There was a whipping sound and the entire carriage then sped up without warning, rocking vigorously!

Gilbert's countenance changed greatly. He pounced towards the front part of the carriage and without caring about Thales' reaction, loudly shouted, "Jines, no! Wait—"

However, it was too late.

Jines shouted furiously from the driving seat. "Come! Shameless people!"

Along with the sharp turn of Jines' wrist, the whip hit the old beggar's body and rang furiously.

Snap!

The force was great and a trickle of blood flew from the beggar's body. Along with his blood, the old beggar flew five meters away. A scimitar fell from his sleeve.

When the stunned Thales was still trying to figure out what happened, a beggar behind the carriage suddenly leaped with a dagger in his hands. He cried furiously, "It happened. Attack!"

From among the beggars and squatters, more than ten figures pounced towards the carriage! Thales' countenance changed drastically. 'There're more than seven assassins!'

Unfortunately, when he was able to count the number of assassins clearly, the enemy had already commenced the attack.

The two horses were the first to be assaulted. While rolling past the carriage, two assassins cut through the horses' stomachs. Blood splattered out together with the sad cries of the black steeds.

Amid Jines' furious yells and whipping, the carriage continued moving forward from the inertia, but then immediately ran onto the fallen horses. The entire coach began to roll towards its side.

Jines leaped up forcefully and whipped an assassin beside her. The assassin fell back on the ground.

Her countenance was frenzied. Clenching her teeth, she pulled out the long sword from her waist and turned back around, thrusting it into the left chest of an assassin behind her.

Thump!

The coach finally fell onto its side on the road. The moment the carriage fell, Thales was hugged tightly by Gilbert and sheltered under his body. Along with the movement of the carriage, they fell beside the window. Three assassins leaped onto the overturned coach!

As Thales dizzily got onto his feet, Gilbert pressed him to the side.

Crack!

It was not the assassins, but Gilbert, who began attacking. Calmly, he pulled out his staff, raised his arm and waved it, completely shattering the glass window above them.

Shards of glass flew upwards. The three assassins subconsciously raised their arms to protect their eyes.

Gilbert's staff extended outwards like a poisonous snake. A sharp blade popped out of the tip of the staff and executed precise strikes. Holding his neck, an assassin fell.

Thales held his head tightly. He could feel tiny shards of glass falling around him.

Two long swords extended into the coach and aimed for Thales. However, they were deflected by the Noble Rapier in Gilbert's left hand with marvelous skill and strength.

Slash! One blade thrust into the sofa on Thales' left and another swept past his right arm, thrusting into the air. Thales clenched his teeth, feeling the icy-cold sensation on his right arm.

One of the assassins saw the situation inside the coach. He spoke in surprise, "No..."

However, before the assassin could finish, he was cut off.

Yodel appeared behind the two assassins like a ghost and cut through their necks from the back with a dark-colored short sword.

The two shabbily-dressed assassins immediately went limp and plopped down.

"Take him away!" Gilbert growled furiously. Shielding off the falling shards of glass, he pressed on the coach and flung himself out of the carriage.

Yodel grabbed Thales' belt and fished him out of the coach.

Between Jines' furious growls, Thales saw the situation around him clearly. Under the illumination of Eternal Lamps, seven or eight assassins who were dressed as beggars dragged their long shadows and pounced towards the overturned carriage!

Passersby ran off in the midst of shrill screams and wails. The street was suddenly in chaos.

Gilbert kicked a piece of carriage debris at the nearest assassin. He then forced back a knife-wielding assassin to his left with two swords.

Yodel moved quickly and slashed open the throat of an assassin who pounced towards him. He then enveloped Thales in his embrace. As he prepared to enter the Path of Shadows, something strange happened!

Crack-!

A shrill explosion rang through the air!

Yodel's hand suddenly released Thales.

Crack—

It was an extremely high-pitched, piercing sound!

At that moment, Thales clenched his molars in pain. He felt as though the sound was making his head explode.

'Damn! What is this sound?'

He subconsciously covered his ears. However, that intense sound was like magic, crawling into his brain regardless of any obstructions.

Crack—

The sound was still continuing. Jines and Gilbert seemed to be greatly affected, their faces distorted, and they moved contortedly. Amid the quaking, Jines even cut her left arm on a blade.

Screech—

The magic sound became more and more intense.

Yodel trembled, trying to resist the invasion of the sound. His head was lowered and Thales knew that he was speaking. However, the transmigrator could not hear it at all as his mind was filled with the tormenting sound.

Thales narrowed his eyes, enduring the pain in his eardrums and covering his ears with all his might. When he raised his head, he was shocked to see that the assassins could still move freely, although they looked like they were in pain. Five of them extended their hands towards their backs and took out a weapon. They aimed their weapons at Thales and the Masked Protector.

'Crossbows.'

A surge of coldness passed through Thales' heart. He did not doubt anymore that this was a carefully planned assassination.

The strings of the crossbows vibrated at the same time.

In the thick of the magic sound, the pull of the bowstrings on the crossbows could not be heard. However, five elongated black shadows appeared in Thales' sight at the same time.

The next moment, Thales was thrown a few meters away by Yodel.

Screech—

Amid the tormenting magic sound and the squall, Thales saw with despair that the black shadows were shooting at the Masked Protector.

As Thales twirled, he saw Yodel's figure suddenly tremble.

'No. Yodel... Yodel Cato,' Thales thought fearfully.

Thales fell on the ground, then tumbled twice.

Screech— The magic sound became nearer and nearer.

He covered his ears, and managed to stand up—in pain and trembling. However, there was a shabbily dressed figure in front of him.

It was an unkempt, young beggar who had a delicate and childish appearance. He was not much older than Thales.

His lips were parted and vibrated at a high frequency.

As he approached, the sound also neared. With a cold countenance, the beggar took out a dagger from his waist.

Thales, who was clenching his teeth and enduring the magic sound understood something.

Based on the instinct he had acquired after practicing for almost a month, he subconsciously placed his right foot to the back and raised his left arm. He then shifted his weight backwards and assumed the standard Northland Military Sword Style position.

One of the three defense styles—Iron Body Style.

Amid the magic sound, the dagger quickly thrust towards him and pierced through his left arm.

Pain invaded Thales. He clenched his teeth, knowing he had made the right choice.

The young beggar was a little stunned, but he immediately widened his mouth at Thales. As his lips and tongue vibrated, the magic sound became even higher pitched.

Screech-

The sensation at that split second made Thales shut his eyes tightly.

He shouted wildly and futilely, almost feeling like digging his eardrums out!

Amid the intensely vibrating air, it was as though every single cell on Thales' body began trembling.

He felt himself becoming hot, like food heated up with a microwave.

'Stop!'

He quickly retracted his arms and instinctively covered his ears.

'Stop!'

The dagger was pulled out of his left arm with a splattering of blood.

'Stop!'

Thales pulled his face in pain, kneeling down surrounded by the terrifying magic sound.

'Stop!'

The dagger was thrust towards his throat again.

'Quickly stop!'

At the last moment, Thales opened his eyes in despair and saw that the young assassin's cold-blooded face was slowly distorting into another blurred face.

It was a girl with long eyelashes. She widened her bright eyes and looked at him curiously.

"Eh? Your name is Wu Qiren? What a weird name. My name? Why don't you guess...?"

The transmigrator trembled and extended his hand towards the bleary face. Excitement and boiling heat simultaneously rushed into his heart.

He suddenly felt pain in his left shoulder, and the magic sound ringing beside his ears became louder, making the girl's subsequent words inaudible. Her blurred lips opened and closed.

'Stop.'

He muttered without realizing it.

'Stop. I can't hear her anymore! Stop.'

His extended hand suddenly made a grabbing motion, and it was as if he grabbed something out of thin air.

'Stop.'

He muttered.

And then...

The magic sound really stopped.

His head no longer felt as if in disorder.

His eardrums were not in pain anymore.

And the scene in front of his eyes returned to normal as Thales opened his tremblingly opened his eyes.

The dagger that thrust at his throat was now lodged in his left shoulder.

While the owner of the dagger, the young assassin, held onto the handle and kneeled, devoid of energy.

Facing him, the young assassin collapsed into Thales' embrace. The corner of his lips convulsed and his whole body trembled.

Thales looked at him in bewilderment.

The young assassin's face became paler and paler. He stared into Thales' eyes, his gaze filled with bewilderment and confusion.

'Why?'

Thales could read this message from his gaze.

Gasping heavily and enduring the pain in his shoulder, Thales stared at him in surprise. The transmigrator also wanted to know why, only a moment ago, the murderous Psionic assassin... wait.

'Wait. This is...?'

Thales held the young man as he panted and lowered his head. The transmigrator held up his warm right hand in the space between their arms and bodies.

He looked at the warm and wet thing in his hand as he trembled. It was an irregularly-shaped red ball. There were a lot of tubes sticking out of it.

It seemed to be... trembling too?

Thales focused his gaze. He saw it clearly.

His gray pupils immediately contracted!

In Thales' past life, he did not do very well in his high school biology classes. After entering university and becoming a postgraduate student, his biology knowledge decayed even more rapidly.

But that did not stop him from recognizing the object in his hand.

It was a blazing hot, still beating... blood-red and wet... heart.

The blood vessel between its two atriums, unable to absorb any blood, convulsed abruptly.

Thales subconsciously looked towards his chest, then looked at the young assassin's chest. However, their chests were both whole and unharmed, without a single drop of blood.

*Ba-bump... Ba... bump... *

The heart beat softer and softer.

Slower and slower.

After being stunned for a few seconds, Thales trembled suddenly. The bloody, fresh heart slid from his hands and dropped between the young assassin's knees.

The young assassin's breathing became weaker and weaker. Pale-faced, it was as though he recognized his fate.

"Lucy..." He groaned lethargically beside Thales' ear.

That was his final word. Until he stopped moving.

Thales could finally hear the sound of fighting beside him again.

His entire body trembling, the transmigrator extended his hand that was drenched in warm blood. He endured the pain and, with great effort, pulled out the dagger from his left shoulder. He threw it aside without looking at it and escaped from the young assassin while rolling and crawling.

The young assassin's corpse fell face-down powerlessly. He pressed down... on that heart.

His own heart.

'What... is this? Did I 'lose control' again?'

Thales shuddered and remembered Yodel, who was surrounded and attacked by bows and arrows.

He instinctively turned his head around, but aside from the assassins' corpses beside the carriage, there was nothing else.

Thales was still in pain. His ears twitched from the sound... Another assassin fell beside him.

At the instant the magic sound disappeared, the assassins noticed the bizarre situation in the corner. As Gilbert and Jines' continued their efforts to hold them back, someone finally freed himself and rushed over to provide assistance.

The assassin that came over as support looked at the boy lying on the ground in shock,

then looked at Thales before he flung his right hand without hesitation. A hidden blade under his wrist appeared.

Thales reached out towards JC's dagger and thought about the possibilities between defending and fleeing.

'Perhaps... ' He cast a glance at the young assassin's corpse, 'I can use that power... '

Right at that moment, intense pain burst forth all over Thales' body!

"Urk!"

Thales grit his teeth and fell to the side. It was as if someone was ripping his soul apart!

'No! No!'

However, the assassin did not bother with his condition. He only thrust his hidden blade towards Thales coldly... But at that moment, Thales could not even be bothered worrying about the safety of his own life.

He had never experienced this sort of pain before. It was as if every single part of his body was crying out in protest!

"Ah!"

In the end, Thales could not handle the excruciating pain, which made him feel as if he was being tortured. He screamed, convulsing, and could only watch as the enemy's hidden blade attacked him.

'Is this the end? So painful. So... so painful.

'That strength is truly... not without consequences.'

However...

Stab!

Right before the assassin managed to have his attack land, a tall and slender figure appeared behind him.

Before the assassin could even manage to turn around, a long sword that came charging towards him pierced through his brain.

Thales, who collapsed on the floor, lifted his head while on the verge of death.

A young, round-faced noble with elegant movements and who paid great attention to detail with his clothes, walked forth from behind the assassin. The young noble frowned, then wiped off the liquid on his sword on the assassin's clothes.

The pain receded like a tidal wave.

When he felt that the pain had temporarily faded, Thales sucked in a sharp breath like a drowning man. He looked at the noble's shoulder, and then a shiver so strong that it caused even his vision to sway wracked his body.

There was an embroidered, complicated, flower-patterned heraldry. Thales recognized it.

Red, blue, green, three petals.

Tricolor Iris Flower.

Chapter 53

Send Them Into the Palace!

That extreme pain that began from the inside of the body and extended to the outside had already disappeared from Thales' body.

Pressing on the wound on his left arm and shoulder, Thales panted with difficulty and looked at the young noble before him.

"Thank... thank you."

A distance away, Lord Seychelles' sword sparkled. He nimbly finished off the last assassin.

Near the overturned carriage, Jines shrugged away Seychelles' supporting hand. With a cold expression, she walked towards an assassin on the floor who was not completely dead yet. Under the knight's furrowed brows, she exerted great strength and thrust her sword between the assassin's eyes.

The unrelated passersby had already escaped and dispersed. Amid the chaos and dead bodies on the street, Thales could not find the Masked Protector's figure. He could only hope that he survived the double-attack of the magic sound and the arrows. After all, Yodel was a supreme class elite.

On the floor, the exhausted Gilbert looked towards their direction anxiously.

However, ever since he saw the Iris Flower emblem, Thales knew that his most urgent task at hand was to deal with the young noble who saved his life, along with his follower—the knight who could defeat the assassins with ease, and was obviously not a simple retinue.

Iris Flower. Gilbert had only started educating Thales on noble heraldry and their emblems. However, this did not prevent him from understanding the meaning behind this emblem.

When he was kidnapped by the Blood Clan, the waving flag in Vine Manor told Thales

that whatever family the flower symbolized, it probably did not have very good feelings towards the Jadestar Royal Family.

"...Those people..." Thales' face was panic-stricken, just like a typical seven-year-old child who had just faced danger and had not calmed down yet. He spoke fearfully, "Those people suddenly just pounced towards us..."

'This child could travel together with the king's lover and his closest attendant—who is also the former Foreign Affairs Minister...' Zayen thought, 'and was almost assassinated on the way to the Central Region. Who is he? Could he be an unforeseen circumstance who might affect the plan?'

"Child, do not be afraid, it is alright now." The young, round-faced noble smiled and placed his sword back into its sheath.

Looking at the seven-year old boy, he elegantly said, "Assassins are creatures that live in the dark. Away from the dark, they are completely harmless and are good for nothing.

"I am Zayen Covendier, one of the thousands of nobles in this kingdom. As long as I am around, I will not allow them to hurt you. And child, may I know who you are?" Zayen asked politely and raised his brows.

'Me...?'

Beneath his shaken appearance, Thales took a deep breath and contemplated the situation at hand, 'I have not made an official appearance, and am not recognized as a Jadestar yet. However, I am definitely a thorn in the flesh of those nobles who have the potential to be crowned.

'Before reaching the palace, I must not reveal my identity.'

Thales looked towards Gilbert.

When Gilbert saw Zayen, even his hat fell. The former Foreign Affairs Minister's body was shaky and covered in injuries. However, he braced himself with his staff and limped from afar.

'He's still a distance away, and can't explain on my behalf,' Thales thought, 'But right now... '

He looked towards Zayen. With a skeptical gaze, the latter waited for his answer.

Looking at Thales, who did not utter a single word, Zayen's suspicions grew.

The young duke glanced around and saw Gilbert, who was some distance away.

'Is he hesitating? Or does he indeed have a fishy identity and is waiting for Caso to come to his rescue?'

"Are you waiting for Count Caso?" Zayen smiled. "To be personally escorted by the kingdom's most outstanding Foreign Affairs Minister ever, you seem like you have quite the background, child."

Having felt Zayen's suspicions, the boy knew that he could not bluff his way through anymore. Otherwise, even if Gilbert helped conceal his identity, the noble with the Iris Flower emblem would not easily believe it.

"I am- I am Thales." Thales searched through his memory for his supposed identity and adapted it to his current circumstances. With the kind of fear that can only be found in a seven-year-old child, he slowly said, "They all say that I am... that I am Lord Mahn's illegitimate child."

"Mahn?" Zayen's gaze flickered. "The kingdom's warrior in the Desert War, Lord Soren Mahn who died in combat at the Western frontline a year ago?"

'The "Frontline Charger", Mahn's illegitimate child? Hasn't Mahn's territory and manor already been taken back?' He frowned slightly.

Thales was slowly sweating from his palms. Gilbert only told him about the basic state of affairs in Mahn Manor. He never told him about what sort of person Lord Mahn was.

"I don't know, they don't really tell me about... my father," Thales said sadly as he lowered his head.

Gilbert finally arrived in front of them. With a shocked and worried expression, the former Foreign Affairs Minister trembled as he bowed towards Zayen. "Thank you for your generous help. I did not expect to see you here, Duke Covendier."

Zayen immediately took a step forward and held on to Gilbert, whose body was full of injuries and was on the verge of collapsing. This time, his gaze was especially earnest.

"Count Caso, I would prefer to encounter you in another occasion and talk as we drink, rather than this despicable assassination where I lend you a helping hand," he said earnestly.

Zayen quietly recalled the identity of this man. 'Count Gilbert Caso... The Cunning Fox of Constellation.

'This was how other kingdoms, with Eckstedt starting with it, addressed Count Caso after the "Fortress Treaty [1]" was formed. At the time, he was still a viscount who recently inherited his father's title. This is adequate proof of the man's wisdom and tactics.

'Twelve years ago, as Constellation's negotiator, he skillfully maneuvered the conference table between kingdoms and thwarted the Great Dragon of the North's intentions to push southwards.

'He was also the first noble who was promoted from viscount to count purely on the basis of diplomatic achievements.

'When news spread that the negotiation was successful, almost all of Constellation celebrated wildly. They joyously celebrated the end of the Bloody Year.

'If it weren't for political reasons, Gilbert, who was unbeatable in the political scene at the time, would have most certainly become King Kessel's next Prime Minister. That old Cullen wouldn't have stood a chance. He is a rare talent in Constellation. If one day, I become... He would be of great help.' Zayen contemplated.

Zayen quickly put on a stern and serious expression. "I will instruct the police station to not let go of this sordid assassination, no matter the reason! The perpetrator must pay the price!"

Similarly, Gilbert was also surmising the young duke from one of the Six Great Clans—the Covendier Family—and whom was promoted only two years ago.

Two years ago, when the old duke passed away in that regrettable family tragedy, everyone thought that the visibly declining Covendier family, along with the prosperous South Coast Hill, would be scattered and divided due to the endless internal strife.

His Majesty had even written an edict after reaching an agreement with the other

families, preparing to intervene in this internal family strife to obtain benefits. That was until this young duke, who at the time was rumored to be at odds with his family, returned from his travels in the faraway Eastern Peninsula.

Facing pressure from three of his powerful cousins and to the surprise of all the nobles, Zayen reunited Tricolor Iris Flowers and the South Coast—making them one of the most honorable families and one of the most affluent powers in Constellation once more.

Gilbert chose his words carefully. "Sir Covendier, I will always remember your kind deed. However, before that, I have to..."

At that moment, Thales, who was beside them, suddenly spoke up and interrupted their respective thoughts.

"Sir Caso," as the two men looked at him, the seven-year-old Thales sadly lowered his head and said in a reluctant tone, "I... I don't feel like inheriting Mahn Manor anymore."

The tired Gilbert's gaze flickered. 'Thales, he is reminding me,' he thought.

"I am only an illegitimate child who has only seen my father's face a few times. I don't have many rights anyway. And..." Thales tremblingly raised his head, his eyes were filled with frightened tears. "What happened just now, I don't want to experience it again. I just want to be the Thales without a family name again!"

Gilbert sighed. With Zayen staring at him, his eyes shone. "Child, I understand what you are feeling. To be caught in the whirlwind of inheritance will never be a pleasant memory—we are truly grateful of your help, Your Grace—however, this is His Majesty's order."

"Your Grace, we must rush to Renaissance Palace immediately." Standing aside, Jines finished bandaging up her wounds and walked towards them with an unpleasant expression, cutting off their conversation. She did not dare to actually look at Thales and Gilbert. Instead, with an overbearing expression, she insisted on leaving.

However, as she was about to grab Thales, Seychelles stopped her arm midair. The latter looked at the young duke without any emotion on his face and waited for his decision.

Zayen narrowed his eyes and spoke with considerable grace, "Forgive me for

interrupting, so, this boy... Thales, is going to inherit the Mahn Family assets?"

Gilbert looked at Thales with a complicated gaze. "This is a task from His Majesty, and we were not supposed to disclose it. However, since the master of Tricolor Iris Flowers is enquiring..." Gilbert sighed and nodded. "His Majesty ordered us to bring this child before him, so that his father's inheritance, including the Mahn Manor can be transferred to him.

"You know Lord Mahn emerged as a power to be reckoned with during the Desert War, and had a deep friendship with His Majesty during his lifetime. After he died in combat, all his territories and assets were committed to the royal family's care... Until someone discovered his illegitimate child." Gilbert continued to weave the lie without batting an eyelid.

"Obviously, there is a party that is not very satisfied with Lord Mahn's heir..." Gilbert looked at the ground that was littered with the assassin corpses and put on a worried face. "You know, the manor is extremely large. And after Lord Mahn rose to power, a lot of relatives appeared out of thin air."

Zayen stared at Thales, his gaze was frozen on the boy for two seconds.

'The orphaned illegitimate son of the hero? To enter Renaissance Palace? To receive a title from His Majesty, and inherit his father's wealth? At this time?'

He glanced at Jines. 'And... With the company of the Head of Female Officials, who is also His Majesty's lover?'

A distance away, bustling noises and synchronized, advancing footsteps could be heard.

The City Defense Team and police force had finally arrived.

Jines' composure was obviously anxious while Gilbert maintained his visage. However, Thales knew that Gilbert definitely did not want him exposed under the public eye. Even if it was with the identity of 'Lord Mahn's illegitimate son'.

As the other three were anxiously waiting, Zayen suddenly flashed a smile. "I see, no wonder His Majesty placed so much emphasis on this. Lord Mahn was not only His Majesty's battle companion, but also Constellation's hero. His kin most definitely should not be left to deal with ugly conspiracies."

Thales breathed a sigh of relief.

Zayen then said worriedly, "However, both of you are quite heavily injured. Fortunately, the City Defense Team and police force are here. The two of you can obtain treatment and assistance from them, and must also explain what happened in the assassination clearly from start to finish.

Zayen spoke plainly, "As for this child, since it is His Majesty's order, you can entrust him to me. I am heading towards Renaissance Palace."

Gilbert and Jines' expressions changed.

"Your Grace! That is too much trouble for you!" Gilbert's looked stern as he spoke decisively, "And this is my duty—"

"This child's safety should be the top priority! He has already survived an assassination!" Zayen said, his tone filled with emotion. He kneeled on one knee and tore out a piece of cloth from his sleeve, bandaging Thales' wounds. "And the hero's orphan deserves this from me."

Thales' expression became stiff.

Zayen thought coldly, 'This excuse is too clumsy. To dispatch his most trusted attendant and his lover to fetch the orphan of a low-level noble at such a pivotal moment? Even though that noble is the king's battle companion whom had experienced life and death scenarios together! There must be something suspicious about that boy!'

Zayen nodded at them while as he smiled, putting on an expression that told them not to worry. "With Tricolor Iris Flowers' name and Seychelles ability, he will definitely be safe."

Sensing Zayen's gaze, Thales felt a surge of coldness run up his upper back.

"Zayen Covendier!" Jines furiously took a step forward, but was halted by Seychelles and his sword.

"Step back, madam." The supreme class knight did not budge at all, his gaze was cold. "This is the duke's will, and also my mission."

Gilbert's brows were furrowed very tightly. Facing the duke and the supreme class knight, he anxiously thought of ways to handle the situation.

"Sir Covendier! This is not appropriate!" Gilbert had never spoken with such a stern tone before, "This is His Majesty's..."

"My respect towards His Majesty cannot be doubted by anyone!" Zayen said loudly, staring intently at Thales, "However, it is obvious that my carriage and guard are more suitable for His Majesty's duty compared to all of you, who are covered in injuries."

Zayen turned his head, and his words were foreboding. "Or is it because all of you are hiding something else from me?"

Gilbert was momentarily at a loss for words while Jines threw a cold glare and held the handle of the sword at her waist tightly—she was already prepared to snatch Thales back.

Thales also became anxious. 'Follow this person? How is that possible! But due to Yodel's disappearance, using brute force would only be counterproductive. What do I do?'

Thales frantically contemplated all the possible solutions, including the power within himself!

'What do I do?'

Having seen the three people's reactions, Zayen was even surer of his own assumptions. He smiled, a little mockingly, "Child, you don't have to be anxious. His Majesty is known for being righteous and impartial. And since you are Lord Mahn's heir, is it not perfectly justified for you to inherit your father's assets?"

"You should be proud of your father, his brave assault in that sacrificial battle rescued us from the entire Desert War. Please allow me to escort you as a sign of my respect towards the hero."

Seeing Zayen's bright smile, Thales felt his skin crawl, he could not think of a strategy. It seemed that the solemn Gilbert and the anxious Jines could not think of one either.

The corner of Zayen's lips curled up. He stood up and extended his right hand as a sign of invitation. "Please go ahead... young Sir Thales?"

Thales took a deep breath and glanced at the middle-aged noble and the female official. 'It seems that there's no other way.'

At this moment, the people who made those synchronized footsteps finally entered their field of vision.

There were at least a dozen skilled warriors, who were completely silent and moved with precision. They were equipped with iron armors, long swords, silver shields, steel helmets, and even mystic guns and specialized infantry crossbows. Grand and magnificent, they walked into the scene in synchrony and surrounded everyone there.

Everyone's expressions changed at the same time.

Seychelles was the first one to clearly see the equipment and emblem on those warriors. With an unpleasant expression, he went near the duke and said in a low voice, "They are not from the police force and the city defense team! They are the Royal Guards!"

Zayen's countenance immediately turned extremely unpleasant. Gilbert and Jines both clearly saw the person who led the murderous, skilled warriors.

Both of their faces relaxed.

That person was a short figure wearing a cloak, the head and face tightly wrapped up. "In the name of Constellation's..."

Thales then noticed that the voice beneath that cloak belonged to a young woman. The short and small figure took a step forward and scratched her head. "In the name of that supreme king..."

However, the owner of that voice seemed to be unfamiliar with the situation, and was also a little unacquainted with this manner of speech. She continued shouting, "In the name of Ke- Kes- Kessel- what was it- Jade- ah it's so hard to pronounce! In short, in the name of your king!"

Under Thales' stunned gaze, the short and small figure placed her hand on her hip, then raised a hand and pointed, one by one, at the people there, speaking furiously, "Take Madam Jines, that gray-faced uncle, and that little brat..."

"And send all of them to his palace!"

Translator's Note:

1. Fortress Treaty, previously known as Garrison Contract: Hello, after some debate with the group, Garrison Contract has been changed to Fortress Treaty. It is due to an inconsistency with one of our other locations: Broken Dragon Fortress, and since it was directly related to the treaty, we thought it was only right for us to change the name. We apologize for the previous error.

Chapter 54

Sunset's Spokesperson

Thales, who was quite heavily injured, was piggybacked by a member of the Royal Guards. Despite the dizziness from the rocking, he was advancing at the same speed as the battalion.

The pain in his left shoulder and left arm roused him from his unconsciousness.

'Where am I?' He shook his head with force.

Thales only realized after a while that he could not think straight. He was escorted by the entire team of skilled Royal Guards, led by the cloaked woman, and advanced steadily amid their marching steps.

On the other hand, Gilbert and Jines were walking alongside the cloaked woman. It seemed like they were conversing in a low voice. Thales inhaled deeply, and with fatigue weighing him down heavily, raised his head and looked around.

They passed by a stately, grayish black palace wall which was continuous, long and seemingly endless. The body of the wall was mottled with different hues and worn at some parts. It seemed to have been here for a long time.

With synchronized steps, the Royal Guards reached a gigantic, steel portcullis that was controlled using complicated brake cables. Under more than ten huge city defense ballistae atop of the palace wall, the Royal Guards were only allowed entry after exchanging secret codes with the sentries who kept a tight watch.

Thales opened his mouth dumbfounded. He stared at the starlit and moon-bathed sky in a daze. The ground beneath his feet went from muddy road, to coarse, stone floor, then to beautiful tiles specially paved by some unknown material. The Everlasting Lamps on both sides became increasingly larger, more intricate, and brighter.

When they arrived, a magnificent, pyramid-shaped building that resembled a gigantic slope appeared abruptly before his eyes. Members of the Royal Guards were posted every few yards apart from each other, teams upon teams of patrol soldiers and busy

servants nodded in greeting towards them. Thales suddenly realized that they had arrived...

At Eternal Star City's tallest, largest, most magnificent, and also most distinguished building.

Thales' expression relaxed. He lowered his head again.

.....

When he awoke once more, it was the following morning.

Thales realized that he was wearing a set of coarse pajamas and lying on a stone bed with a soft mattress on it.

A little startled, he flexed his already bandaged left hand and left shoulder. Having felt that he was not doing too badly, he lightly leaped down from the stone bed and stepped on the floor that was made of a similar ice-cold stone material.

The icy temperature and crude tactility could be felt from beneath his feet. Thales furrowed his brows. He took a few steps forward and touched the similarly cold stone wall as he sized up the place.

The ceiling was not high, but it was, surprisingly, made of the same stone material as the wall, floor, and bed. It radiated with a faint chillness.

He walked towards the windowsill and opened the wooden window. A cold wind poured in and made him tremble.

Fortunately, the winter sun shone luxuriously from the tall stone windowsill and into the purely stone-made room.

However, compared to the warm Mindis Hall, even the daytime and sunlight could not chase away the uncomfortably cold and wet feeling of this room.

'Just like... Just like in Abandoned House.'

Thales heart stirred, and he recalled the place he stayed at for four years. He looked out of the window.

The boy immediately gasped.

The moment he stuck his head out, he looked downwards and saw the ant-like crowds, carriages the size of nails, houses as small as chest lattices, and streets that looked like fine striations. Without doubt, this room was situated somewhere extremely high up, overlooking the capital city's fascinating scenery.

'Just like my past life,' he told himself.

At that moment, the only door—made of thick wood—in the room was pushed open.

The first-grade female official, Jines Bajkovic, appeared at the entrance.

"Madam Jines?" Seeing a familiar person, Thales immediately felt a lot more at ease.

"Looks like you are recovering well." Jines' face was a little pale and she did not seem to have much energy. However, she was still strong enough to hold herself up.

'This is far more than well...' Jines thought, 'He was just stabbed by a dagger yesterday and today... even orcs don't possess it this ability to recover.'

She sighed.

"By the way, Jines- Erm, Madam Jines!" Out of anxiousness, Thales forgot to use honorifics. He hastily took a step forward. "Yesterday... Yodel and Gilbert..."

Jines extended a hand and cut Thales off. She quietly said, "Don't worry. Gilbert is with His Majesty. They have something to take care of. As for Yodel, he is still alive..."

'Still alive?' Thales was stunned. 'Does it mean that... '

Jines seemed to have realized that her words were a little too much. She immediately corrected herself, "He was struck by a few crossbow arrows and is recuperating now. Yesterday, it was also thanks to his timely warning to His Majesty's other secret protector that the Royal Guards could arrive in time.

With complicated emotions, Thales sighed in relief. 'Fortunately... That wasn't the last time... The Masked Protector... lived.'

Thales then recalled his conversation with Yodel last night.

The question that Yodel did not answer, and the myriad of doubts associated with him.

Thales also thought of the innocent children who were killed in Abandoned House and his heart darkened.

'Why... Why did Yodel just stand by and watch them die? Was it...?'

Thales sighed. No matter what the answer to the question was, after last night's alarming and dangerous incident, and after Yodel sacrificed his life to save him...

But the matter stuck to Thales' heart like a thorn, making him unable to forget.

Thales knew that he would be unable to trust Yodel without any doubt or hostility anymore. He would no longer be able to trust him like when he first met him.

Thales shook his head and shifted his attention back to Jines' words. 'Wait, the OTHER secret protector?'

Thales thought of the young, cloaked woman. He kept this information in his mind. Before he could digest this, the thoughts in his mind jumped to another matter. "And those assassins, and that Duke Covendier..."

Jines' gaze became stern, and it reminded Thales of those days where they trained vigorously. She said, "That is not something that you should concern yourself over. Everything is already settled. Those questions will soon no longer be questions anymore... and, you should believe in your father."

"My... father?"

With difficulty, Thales recalled this unfamiliar term. It was not that he did not care, but from Red Street Market to Mindis Hall, he had only met his supposed 'father' only once. Not to mention that he had treated Thales in that strange manner.

Thales clenched his fist lightly. Another question surfaced in his mind. "What about you?"

Jines was slightly stunned. "Me?"

Thales raised his head, took a deep breath, and put on a worried expression. "Yes, what about you, Madam Jines? On the carriage..."

Watching Jines' increasingly unpleasant expression, Thales clenched his teeth and spoke, "I noticed your anomaly... When facing those assassins, why were you... behaving so strangely?"

Thales saw that the normally calm and confident Jines was trembling slightly after hearing those words, as if she was recalling the most terrifying memory ever.

Thales watched her in a daze. The female official's face twisted, and she looked as if she was struggling against her shivers while her face turned pale.

Thales furrowed his brows.

A few seconds later, Jines heaved a sigh and loosened all the tension on her face, looking like the usual cold female official once more. It was as though everything just now was an illusion.

Jines stared at the bewildered Thales with a flat stare. 'This little brat is so sensitive.'

The female official snorted softly and spoke once again in a formal tone. However, her face became tired and bitter. "I asked the servants to prepare hot water and breakfast. Tidy yourself up, we still have something important to do."

'As though nothing had happened... She is deliberating avoiding it.' Thales furrowed his brows.

However, Jines glared sternly at him, as if giving him a warning. Thales could only shrug. "Alright, then... wait."

"Servants?" Thales was stunned for a moment. He immediately turned his head and looked around the room that resembled a coffin more than a bedroom. "So, we are at..."

Jines nodded tiredly. "Yes, you are at Eternal Star City's biggest and most important building—the palace of Constellation's past supreme kings."

Jines said the following name in a deadpan manner, "Renaissance Palace."

Thales opened his mouth wide and thought of the gigantic pyramid-shaped building he saw yesterday. 'No wonder the room is so high up.'

He then furrowed his brows and looked around. The mottled wall, dull color scheme, dim lighting, low heat, hard slab stone, rough floors, and narrow room. Compared to Mindis Hall, this place looked like the slums.

Jines saw Thales' gaze.

"What? Are you not used to it?" She crossed her arms and observed Thales' expression with interest.

"No, it's not that." Thales immediately waved his hands and shook his head. He wanted to say something, but in the end, he only sighed and lowered his head.

In truth, he wanted to say that he had the soundest sleep ever over the past twenty-something days. The hard and cold bed along with the rough and uneven floor allowed Thales to feel a sense of security the soft bed and blanket in Mindis Hall could not offer him.

'I see...' Thales realized sadly. '...I slept best throughout my four years as a child beggar in the harsh and vicious Abandoned House.'

However, by speaking the truth, Jines obviously assumed that he was being stubborn. She smiled gloomily. "I know what you are thinking. You are right.

"The supreme king's palace is not as magnificent, luxurious, intricate, and as stately as you have imagined."

Jines walked towards the window and fixed her gaze on the countless citizens of the kingdom below the towering Renaissance Palace.

"It is the opposite... Renaissance Palace, which is the alleged center of the kingdom, could not even measure up to a normal citizen's room..."

The next moment, Thales saw in a daze that the arrogant, domineering and tough female official was speaking in a desolate tone, "Very narrow. Very tall. Very cold."

Jines turned and looked at Thales with a complicated expression, she said, "And very dark."

.....

Walking behind Jines Bajkovic, and stepping on the hard and rough stone floor unique to Renaissance Palace, Thales passed by countless rooms that were similarly narrow, cold, and dim.

Along the way, all the guards and servants they met lowered their heads in salutation when they saw Jines.

The lighting in this half, pyramid-shaped palace was so bad that lamps had to be used during the day to illuminate some of the more remote corners. Due to the height, cold air kept seeping in through the cracks. The only redeeming feature of the place was that it was often hard for insects to survive in such places. The narrow walkway and low ceiling made the palace's atmosphere repressive and unpleasant. Sometimes, it almost seemed lifeless.

'This place... ' Thales stuck his tongue out and marveled inwardly. 'Does not look like a palace at all. It looks more like a mausoleum.

'Weren't the Egyptian pyramids from my past life a royal mausoleum that had countless years of ancient history buried beneath it?'

"We have arrived." Jines suddenly stopped, speaking coldly and slowly.

"Arrived... where?" Thales, whose mind had wandered just now, suddenly noticed that they had reached an empty and dim stone corridor. There was a double-hung door in front of them.

Jines did not answer him. She only nodded at Thales with a profound expression. "Go inside, child. Be more polite."

"What sort of..." Before the stunned Thales could finish speaking, Jines pressed on the stone door and abruptly pushed it open.

Boom!

Thales watched the scene behind the stone door in shock. It was a dark room, and only a few corners were illuminated by Everlasting Lamps. The Everlasting Lamp in the center was held in the hands of a... woman who had her back to him?

While Thales was still in shock, he was pushed into the room by Jines.

Boom!

The stone door was closed shut.

When Thales was finally able to stand steadily, he realized that he was locked by Jines inside this stone chamber.

"So it's you, brat?"

Right then, a wholesome, pleasant, gentle and charming voice rang from the center of the room.

Thales turned his head in bewilderment and looked towards the woman, who had her back to him. Holding an Everlasting Lamp, the woman slowly turned. Thales' eyes brightened.

It was an oval-faced beauty, with bright eyes and white teeth, appearing thirty-something years old. Compared to the charming and mature Jines, she lacked a valiant and disciplined bearing. However, she was lovelier and more captivating.

She had a dark-colored veil on her head and wore a robe adorned with half a red sun.

'Wait, half a red sun?'

Thales was stunned. "You are... Sunset Temple's priestess?"

"Sunset Temple? Hahaha..." The beauty chuckled lightly. However, not only did Thales not feel a single ounce of tenderness in the laughter, he even sensed a hint of coldness. "Let me look at you carefully, brat."

The beauty approached him leisurely, but Thales frowned, as he could not feel a single hint of warmth nor kindness from her.

He could feel some sort of unsettling vibe from this woman.

The lovely thirty-year-old woman lowered her body before him and narrowed her eyes while observing Thales. "As expected, you have a pair of grey irises, too... Just like your mother."

'Mother?' Thales was stunned for a moment.

"Did you know... Sorry, Madam, may I know if you knew my mother?" he asked, bewildered. At the same time, he remembered Jines' instruction to "be polite" and immediately used honorifics.

The lovely beauty curled her lips, and her gaze was aloof. "Of course. Your mother... hmm... she is a formidable character who is not to be trifled with... Didn't Kessel tell you?"

Thales' breath unconsciously became uneven and said a little awkwardly, "No, madam. Apart from her name, my... my father never told me anything else."

"I see. Alright, you may leave now." The lovely beauty chuckled coldly and shook the Everlasting Lamp in her hand. Their shadows flickered chaotically in the stone chamber. "Tell Kessel that I'm ready."

'Is it over just like that? Jines, or that father of mine, made me come and see her... what does this mean?' But he had to know.

'Because...' Thales sucked in a deep breath. He was almost a hundred percent sure that all the strange things about him were related to that mother of his with her questionable background.

Thales inhaled deeply and bowed respectfully according to the etiquette taught by Jines. "Madam, if you tell me more about my mother, I would be deeply grateful."

The lovely beauty covered her mouth and chuckled lightly. However, her countenance immediately turned frigid, and she spoke with an icy tone, "Even your father didn't tell you. Why should I?"

Thales was immediately at a loss for words, but it was impossible for him to give up so easily, "But... but this is my mother. I have the right to know! And I will repay you!"

The beauty only chuckled indifferently and turned around. "But you're not my son, and I'm not obligated to tell you. And, I don't need you to repay me."

Thales choked once again. From all the people he met, apart from his own 'father', he had never met such a person before. 'This- She is even more stubborn than the king.'

However, a string of thoughts suddenly formed in his mind. 'More stubborn than the king?'

Thales' brain operated continuously. He had thought of something.

He exhaled deeply and looked at that lovely beauty. "I see. I know who you are now."

The lovely beauty turned her head in astonishment.

"I heard my father and Gilbert talk about you before." Thales frowned deeply and recalled in his mind the memory of when he was first rescued by Yodel and brought to Mindis Hall.

He said slowly, "I remember now. You- you are-"

Thales inhaled deeply and raised his left hand, seeing the faint scar on it.

His expression was one of hesitation for a while, but he immediately spoke with resolution, "You are... the Bloodline Lamp... The lamp used to search for my father's kin... you are the one who cast the divine Art! You are Sunset Temple's Head Ritual Master... Liscia!"

The lovely beauty Liscia's face immediately turned ugly and she said slowly, "You are indeed your mother's son. You even inherited the entirety of her guile and good memory.

"You are right, I am Liscia Arunde. The Head Ritual Master of Sunset Temple. The Sunset Goddess' one and only spokesperson in the world, and also the one who would be validating your status as someone who possesses royal blood."

Chapter 55

She Was a Nightmare

"It seems that my mother had once made you very troubled."

Thales' expression was determined. He had resolved upon finding out the identity of his mysterious mother.

Liscia chuckled lightly and scornfully. Then the lovely ritual master walked towards him with a terrifying gaze. "Troubled? It's far more than that. She was a nightmare."

'Nightmare?' Thales thought of Kessel the Fifth's coldness and disregard towards him and could not help but be stunned.

"You should leave, kingdom's blood." Liscia coldly glared at Thales from above. "I have met you, and your duty is done."

Thales regained his attention and, clenching his teeth, took a step forward.

"TherrenGirana."

Upon hearing this name, Liscia paused suddenly. The emotions in her gaze changed.

Thales took a deep breath and continued speaking, "This is my mother's name. I don't know what this name signifies to you, but no matter what kind of person she is, I need to know!"

Liscia lowered her head slightly and narrowed her eyes.

Suddenly, Thales realized in astonishment that all the Everlasting Lamps there were shining brighter and brighter, brightly illuminating the dim stone chamber. The flames inside the lamps, which had been quiet and gentle, started making crackling sounds!

'Is this... the Divine Arts?' He clenched his left fist tightly.

Liscia stared at Thales' gray eyes. Her frown became increasingly deeper. In the end,

she waved her arm in disdain.

"You are indeed a continuation of that nightmare. Let me give you a piece of advice: Stop asking anything about your damned mother. I won't tell you anything."

Thales stared at Liscia with a dumbfounded gaze.

But he still forced down his displeasure and said in an agitated tone, "But you already told me! You told a son that his mother is a nightmare!"

Thales lifted his head and glared at Liscia's cold, black eyes, refusing to back down. "I'm curious, just whose nightmare is she? My father's?" Thales gritted his teeth and asked, "Or is she YOUR nightmare?"

A piercing light suddenly exploded from Liscia's eyes.

That was not a description, there was literally a golden light bursting out from her eyes!

Thales was unable to open his eyes! He was so shocked that he took a step backwards and lifted his left hand to cover his eyes. His right hand touched JC's dagger.

He felt horrible under that golden light.

'So this is the power that came from that so called Sunset Goddess?'

"Be careful of your words, mortal." As her eyes glowed with a powerful light, and her eyes and gaze became unclear. Liscia said flatly with a dignified expression, "In this mortal world, no one knows more than I do about how despicable and hateful your mother is."

Thales stared at her blankly.

"She is a cold, cruel, treacherous, deceitful whore who was insane and obsessed over influence and power. Every single one of her actions had an ugly motive that cannot be disclosed to others.

"Remember my words: Forget her completely, or else there will come a day when you will regret this."

.....

Thales walked down a few steps absentmindedly, trailing behind Jines on a path in Renaissance Palace on whichever floor, he did not know.

He could not let go of what Liscia had said just now, even after a while. 'Cold, cruel, treacherous, deceitful? Insane and obsessed over influence and power?'

Just who was his mother?

Thales found that the mysteries surrounding his background were becoming greater, especially when it concerned... all the abnormalities of his person.

The boy gritted his teeth.

Jines watched Thales and shook her head lightly.

"Do not take it to heart." Jines pursed her lips, completely unbothered. "It is normal that Liscia does not like you... That woman has always been stubborn, and she cannot let things go."

Thales lifted his head in curiosity, only to hear the female official flatly say, "Before she became the ritual master, she was engaged to your father."

Thales was shocked when he heard it. "Engaged?"

"Yes... Because of various reasons, they did not manage to get married." Jines scoffed disdainfully. "Liscia... That woman, she can't survive without a man. Enraged, she ran to Sunset Temple and from then on, decided to serve the Goddess her whole life.

"So she doesn't like me, either—the king's lover."

The boy, who just heard a huge piece of gossip, opened his mouth in shock.

"But why does that matter?" At that moment, Jines recovered her experienced and capable appearance. The first-grade female official curled the corner of her lips up slightly. "Why should you let others' opinions dictate your fate? Even if it is the Gods' opinion."

At this moment, Jines stopped in front of another, bigger stone chamber, and gently

pushed the door open.

"We are here. Similarly, you have to go in alone." Looking at the stone chamber, Jines' experienced and confident expression from before disappeared. She heaved a sigh in desolation. "Only you and your family can enter this place," the female official said faintly.

"Us... us?" Thales was bewildered. He finally noticed that there was something off about Jines who stood before the door.

But again, Jines pushed him into the stone chamber without any explanation.

.....

Eternal Star City. Western City Gate.

"Wait! Are those in front the Karabeyan Family's carriage fleet? May I know if Count Karabeyan himself is there? Uncle? Uncle, is that you?"

A troop of knights who held a single-winged crow flag rushed over from the city gate and caught up with a carriage that was escorted by more than ten knights. There was an emblem of two towers and a sword carved on the carriage door.

The knights with the single-winged crow flags were led by a male noble who seemed to be over thirty years old. He sped up his horse and went in front of the carriage. He then looked at the stern and dignified old noble with graying temples who disembarked from it.

"Derek, it's you? The Kroma family's young and successful Count of Wing Fort rode a horse here?" the old noble asked gently.

The young Count of Wing Fort, Derek Kroma, smiled. "It takes at least two days and two nights to travel here by carriage, and I wouldn't have made it in time, so I decided to just ride here.

"On my way here, I bumped into the carriage fleet of the Bozdorf and the Lascia Families. They should be here soon. Then, among the thirteen Distinguished Families, all the ones from the west should be here.

"What about you, uncle? I have not seen you for such a long time... How have my

cousin-brother Kohen, aunt, Kasa and Gina been?"

"After returning from the battlefield, Kohen could not sit still... I arranged for him to be a police officer in the capital city... haih." Recalling the complaint made by his old friend, Count Karabeyan heaved a deep sigh.

"As for your aunt, she is still the same, always worrying about Kohen's marriage. This has made the two little demons at home very happy. They are always urging their mother to organize balls, in the name of finding their brother a wife," the old noble said plainly.

"What?" The young Kroma was stunned for a moment. He then smiled. "She has always been like that. When I first reached adulthood, she brought almost half the girls in Walla Hill over."

Kroma then took a step forward and said in a low voice, "Then, is that matter true, that King Nuven's only son died in Constellation?"

The Count of Walla Hill, Turami Karabeyan looked at his nephew and sighed softly. "It seems to be true. I just bumped into Count Zemunto of the Arunde Family. I heard that Eckstedt's messenger is already on the way, and that their army force is being assembled now. Right now, the most anxious ones should be the Duke of Northern Territory himself and the families under him."

Kroma sighed. He leaned his body forward and said with a solemn expression, "Will there be war?"

Count Karabeyan glanced at his nephew and spoke slowly, "If no miracle happens, you should ask this instead—how bad would the war be?"

"Start stocking up food supplies, and prepare for the enlistment of soldiers within the territory." As he spoke, he got down from the carriage and opened his arms to embrace Western City's director of the police station, Lord Lorbec Deira, who was welcoming him. "It's been a long time, old friend!"

"Haha, you have gotten so much plumper!"

"This is the Count of Wing Fort, and also my nephew, Derek Kroma. He is one of the nineteen vassals who are qualified to receive His Majesty's general edict."

"You are the One-Winged Savior from within the thirteen Distinguished Families, the legendary Kroma!"

"You must be the 'Horse Slayer', Lord Lorbec Deira, who rose to fame during the 'Fortress Battle' twelve years ago?"

"Hah, that damned battle..."

After Karabeyan introduced Lorbec and Kroma to each other, a melodious chime suddenly rang from a distance away.

Dong!

The chime was heavy and long, and could be heard from far away.

Kroma, who did not visit the capital city often, frowned. "If I am not mistaken, is that not the Bell of Constellation? Did something significant happen?"

Lorbec, who had been in the capital city for many years, nodded. "Yes. When the Bell of Constellation rings, it means that something important would be announced at the center of all main districts. Usually, it would be the wedding of someone from the royal family or some important personage... However, lately there has been no..."

At that moment.

Dong!

The long chime rang again.

Lorbec's expression changed, and he said solemnly, "The bell rang for a second time! This signifies that within a few hours, His Majesty would be convening a National Conference at Renaissance Palace's Hall of Stars."

"A National Conference? The conference that is known to be directed towards all citizens, whether they are nobles or the populace?" Kroma's face had paled. "But the news of the assassination of the Eckstedt Diplomat Group is still a secret, and only circulated among the nobles. Even the Higher Parliamentary Meeting of Constellation would only be held tonight, is it not? Why would a National Conference be convened right now?"

'True. The matters discussed in the National Conference will be announced to the entire Star Plaza, and the entire Constellation. Do you still remember the declaration of the Desert War?' Director Lorbec thought hard.

Count Derek Kroma watched the citizens of the capital city who gossiped in excitement and rushed towards Star Plaza. His expression was unpleasant. "Could it be that His Majesty is making the news public and declaring war on Eckstedt in advance?"

"Who knows?" Count Karabeyan's expression turned gloomy. "He is the 'Iron Hand King', and it is not as if he has never done anything like this before."

Chapter 56

Live for Constellation

This stone chamber was extremely huge, so huge that it could still appear spacious even if there were over twenty large stone pillars in it.

However, there was no window. Instead, there were only a few large black holes on the ceiling served as air vents.

It was terrifyingly gloomy and cold. Thales stared dazedly at the scene in front of him.

A robust figure wearing an astral blue cape stood with his back to Thales before a stone pillar. A grotto had been dug on the stone pillar where the robust figure was facing. Inside, two large stone urns were placed side by side, along with six little stone jars.

A deep and authoritative voice rang from the figure. "Here lies your grandfather, Aydi Jadestar. Honestly, I did not like to be in the same room as him. When he looked at me, his gaze was always filled with disappointment and accusation. After my mother passed away, I avoided him even more fervently."

That voice did not sound too unfamiliar to Thales. However, he was not very acquainted with it either.

"Come here."

Thales inhaled deeply and adjusted his emotions.

He walked towards his so-called father, the Supreme King of Constellation—King Kessel Jadestar.

The Iron Hand King, Kessel the Fifth was wearing the crown with the nine-pointed star. He had an Everlasting Lamp in his right hand, and tightly held a crystal-studded scepter with a shining tip in his left hand.

He turned and glanced at Thales, his sharp gaze made the boy a little breathless.

"Starting from our second king, John the First, all supreme kings and queens of Constellation were buried in this stone chamber after their death and cremation." Kessel's voice sounded extremely low and deep—as if he was afraid that he would rouse something.

Kessel extended his hand and placed it on the large stone urn on the left. A name was engraved on it.

[King of Eternal Rule, King, Aydi L.K. Jadestar, 595-660]

Kessel looked at the other large stone urn on the right. There was another name on it.

"This was my mother. She passed away when I was fifteen."

[Queen, Natalie J.F. Jadestar, 604-642]

The supreme king ran his hand over the small stone jars with a complicated, indecipherable expression.

"As for the king's sons and daughters who did not inherit the crown nor change their surname, they rest within these little stone jars."

Thales was stunned. He slowly turned his head and, as expected, saw that all four sides of each stone pillar had two large stone urns inside. There would sometimes be a few little stone jars beside them.

'Is this the royal family's... burial ground?'

Kessel lowered his head and looked towards a small stone jar. Thales followed his gaze.

[Starlight God of War, Liberator of Zodra, Duke of Star Lake, John L.K. Jadestar, 613-660]

"This is Uncle John, the only person in our family who had travelled around the world.

"He is my father's youngest brother, and was almost completely raised by my mother. This is why I insisted to place him in my father's grotto."

Kessel ran his hand over the stone jar and flashed a smile, much to Thales' surprise.

"He was experienced and knowledgeable and had great fighting skills. He was also funny, and no one's jokes could surpass his.

"When I was young, every time he came back, my twin brothers and I loved to follow him around and listen to his stories about his romance with Mane et Nox's princess—until my mother coldly exposed him. At that time, I had thought that he was the greatest person in the world.

"John's marriage made my father extremely furious. My God, he married a supreme class female knight! That part of their wedding where they hugged and kissed, I think John must have done it with both feet off the ground.

"After being anointed a duke, John often visited us in the capital city. From time to time, he brought young Constance little gifts. However, after his wife passed away, I rarely saw John smile after that."

Feeling the atmosphere in the stone chamber, Thales did not even dare to exhale. Kessel was lost in his memories, and only turned after a minute.

Kessel looked at another stone jar and frowned slightly. "This is my eldest brother, Midier. He was supposed to inherit the crown."

Hearing a familiar name, Thales immediately looked towards the stone jar.

[Eldest Son of the King, Crown Prince, Midier T.E. Jadestar, 622-660]

"He had the closest relationship with our father, and was the only one who could match up to him when playing chess. He was a man of few words, and always smiled as he watched us brothers mess around. He was clever, and also very likable. Everyone said that he was the best crown prince. He was also the brother I was closest to.

"One day, when I was sixteen, on the way back from a female servant's room, I accidentally saw him sitting despondently in the courtyard, drinking wine with a distressed expression. At that time, I was only puzzled—he had moments when he felt dejected, too? Now, I finally understand him."

Thales looked at the stone jar and thought of the things he had heard about Midier Jadestar.

'So, this is Jines' rescuer, someone Gilbert respects, and the person Yodel hopes that I

"will be better than"?"

The next stone jar.

[The Sword of Reversing Light, the Second Prince, Horace M.E. Jadestar, 623-660]

"This is Horace. He still holds the record for the highest sword speed in the Tower of Eradication during his student days. The last I heard, it had not been broken yet."

Kessel tapped the stone jar with his fingernail and snorted. "He is the only supreme class elite in my family, and even had a prestigious nickname. My father always exclaimed about how the Jadestar Royal Family finally had a third person in the supreme class, after the 'Oath Keeper', Midier the Fourth and the 'Enemy of the Wolves', Prince Keira.

"His relationship with my eldest brother, Midier, was very bad. When playing chess with Midier, he liked to use his Power of Eradication to catapult off the latter's chess pieces in secret. Even with that, he was never able to defeat the smiling Midier. He always told us that, if he was not born a year later than Midier, he should had been the Crown Prince.

"A month before he passed away, he received an invitation from the Tower of Eradication to become a scion. If he passed, he could have become one of the eight supreme class scions of the Tower of Eradication.

"These are Bancroft and Herman, my twin brothers." Kessel glanced towards two stone jars, which were placed side by side, with a complicated gaze. "It was said that a careless female servant messed up their birth order. My father could not endure the sight of two doctors arguing about which baby's head was bigger. That was why my mother simply flipped a gold coin, and with Tormond the First's head portrait, decided that Bancroft would be the third prince, and Herman the fourth.

"That gold coin is now placed in my mother's stone urn together with the first sheet of Politics homework Midier got full marks for, Horace's first Swordsman Trophy, and the baby wrapping cloth used on me and Constance when we were born."

Thales took a step forward and surveyed the two little stone jars clearly.

[The Third Prince, Bancroft N.E. Jadestar, 624-660]

"When we were young, both of them fought endlessly on the dining table. It was virtually our whole family's nightmare. Midier joked that Horace probably went to study in the Tower of Eradication because he was so horrified by those two.

"Bancroft especially enjoyed drawing and sculpting. Half of the funding for the Arts and Culture Department of the National Research Institute was donated by him. However, he was also quite vain. The degree of his vanity was probably only second to his love for money. When we were young, we always said that he should unite with the Seucader family through marriage. Even the dowry itself would be enough for his entire life's spending. In the end, when he visited the Southern Islands, he really did manage to marry a girl from the Seucader family by proposing with a sketch.

"As for Herman, he was the most handsome one out of the five brothers. He was also skilled in music and poetry. All the young girls, whether from the populace or noble families, liked him a lot more compared to the other brothers. Every time he walked on the streets, screams and flowers would follow. That was why he was my father's first choice for the leader of Constellation's delegation to Sacred Tree Kingdom. Unfortunately, he did not manage to marry an elf. Otherwise, my father might have passed the crown down to him to strengthen our elf blood that had been present since Midier the Fourth..."

Kessel held his scepter and gazed at the flame inside the Everlasting Lamp.

"The five of us used to be so close. I still remember that when we were young, we had a group fight in the palace with three princes who visited from Mane et Nox Dynasty. Horace was responsible for attacking and Midier was the one defending. He was mainly protecting me. The twins were flanking. But after we grew up, everything changed.

"Midier was still full of smiles, and I was the closest to him. But I felt that he was becoming more and more unhappy. After returning from the Tower of Eradication, Horace became murderous, and was always trying to show off in front of our father. I still remember that during an Imperial Conference, he reprimanded me for five minutes for going to Red Street Market. Bancroft did not care much for matters between us siblings. However, he always walked the other way when he saw the four of us. Herman was always following Horace around like a lackey. That smile of his really disgusted me."

However, Kessel suddenly stopped smiling, "But all that is not important anymore. Now, they are reunited here."

Kessel walked towards the last little jar. Thales lowered his head and softly clenched his fist.

[Eldest Daughter of the King, Constance N.E. Jadestar, 642-660]

"This is Constance, our little sister," Kessel lowered his head and spoke with a heavy voice. He seemed like he did not want to say much. "She is the only consensus between the five of us. We would have sacrificed everything to protect her happiness and smiles."

Thales sighed. He shut his eyes softly and imagined his aunt, the princess who died when she was eighteen.

"The Jadestar family was born to carry the fate of Constellation," Kessel said plainly.

Thales opened his eyes. Listening to Kessel's heavy breaths, he contemplated the king's reasons for doing what he did today.

In the empty stone chamber, both of them did not speak for quite some time.

Boom!

The king suddenly knocked his scepter hard on the ground. Thales was so surprised he almost jumped.

"I do not know how much you understand about us, nor do I know what you are imagining in regards to the Jadestar surname." Kessel the Fifth's voice was low and stern, not a hint of fatherly emotion was present. "But this is definitely not a relaxing title. It signifies glory, history, and power. More importantly, it signifies sacrifice."

Thales was at a loss for words. He did not know how to reply. Nothing seemed like a correct response.

"Are you prepared?" Kessel finally turned around. His sharp and oppressing sky-blue irises stared straight at Thales. "After being conferred the Jadestar surname, to battle for Constellation, die for Constellation, and..."

Kessel stared at the six little stone jars. His gaze dimmed. "Live for Constellation."

Thales' breathing halted for a moment and then became intensely heavy. 'To battle for Constellation. To die for Constellation. To live for Constellation? This order... '

Thales thought fearfully, 'So, as a Jadestar, to live is far more difficult than to battle and to die?'

The king's gaze was fixed on him. "I am waiting for your answer," the king enunciated each word slowly.

'No room for doubt, and no possibility of defiance.'

Thales gulped.

He could not really stand the atmosphere right now. The boy forced a smile and spoke, "To scream about dying for a country or anything like that, it really sounds like I'm about to fight in a war."

However, Kessel still watched him with a burning gaze.

'Alright, then.' Thales took three deep breaths and opened his eyes. He spoke with a downcast tone.

"No."

Kessel's brow furrowed slightly.

The boy said with disappointment, "Before leaving Red Street Market, all I did was for the sake of struggling to survive. To survive in this damned world. I never thought about anything like what is happening right now—the royal family, conspiracies, being an heir, everything."

He spoke sincerely, "I am not ready to play these games at all, these games where everyone is able to talk and laugh as if nothing is happening even though lives could be lost any time.

"I am more used to worn down houses and hard beds. More used to curling up in a corner, cold and hungry. More used to striving for my friends' survival, as well as my own survival. I am not used to eating and drinking in a luxurious room while plotting

conspiracies, taking away lives, and... starting or dealing with wars, all with a straight face."

The boy exhaled and lowered his head. "I am also not prepared to become Thales Jadestar. Everything happened due to a coincidence, I am not prepared at all."

It was as though Asda's figure appeared in front of his eyes again and was smiling while speaking to him, "Yes, this is indeed a coincidence."

There was a long silence.

Kessel stared at Thales. However, the king who was usually authoritative and unapproachable suddenly put on a complicated and profound expression that the latter had never seen before.

"To strive for the survival of one and one's friends. This is probably the entirety of Jadestar's destiny. It is fine."

There seemed to be emotions running through the king's eyes. He spoke slowly, "That year, I was not prepared either."

Thales raised his head in surprise.

With mockery and hatred, Kessel the Fifth spoke firmly, enunciating each word, "And fate will prepare everything for you."

He swung his cape and took large strides. Thales followed Kessel as he went to the side of the stone pillar.

There was also a grotto there, but it was empty without any large stone urns. There were only two little stone jars in it.

"This shall be my burial ground, even though there are already two jars here," Kessel said plainly as he bent down and caressed the two stone jars without any facial expression.

Thales' mind stopped working for a fraction of a second.

He thought of Gilbert's words about the Bloody Year, and gazed at the jars.

[The Eldest Daughter of the King, Lydia G.K. Jadestar, 656-660]

"I still remember when Lydia was first born, I carried her in my bosom, and was more at a loss than she was. After growing a little, she began running everywhere and was never quiet."

[Eldest Son of the King, Luther K.K. Jadestar, 659-660]

Kessel put the Everlasting Lamp down, hiding his gaze and expression in the shadows. Only his moving lips could be seen, and the corners were slightly curled up. "Luther, on the other hand, was very well-behaved and quiet. He never cried. This was horrible, because we never knew when he was hungry."

"These two children made Keya and Jines worry a lot. As for myself, I was always happy because I was required to do nothing."

The Supreme King of Constellation put his hands on Thales' shoulders. The boy was stunned.

"Fortunately, they do not have to worry about the children anymore." Kessel's words were bone-chilling.

Thales listened with his hair standing on end as Kessel finished speaking.

"Because they will always be here. Not crying and screaming, not running around... Always."

The king suddenly exerted force and grabbed Thales' shoulder hard. Thales' left shoulder was still in pain from the injury. However, he endured it and did not say anything.

"Look, this is what fate prepared for me."

Looking at the two little stone jars, Thales clenched his teeth and his fists lightly. 'Are these... my older sister and brother?'

At that moment, a long and heavy chime rang from outside the stone chamber that buried all of Constellation's kings.

"Go." Kessel Jadestar let go of Thales. "Gilbert and Jines are waiting for you outside the

door."

The king stood up and regained his authoritative and oppressing demeanor. He spoke with an ice cold countenance, "They will prepare everything for you. Just like how fate has also prepared everything for you."

Chapter 57

Prelude

As Thales walked out of the stone chamber with complicated and indecipherable emotions, he already made his guess regarding the long chime and what would be happening next.

"Is it happening today?" He looked calmly at Gilbert and Jines who had been waiting for quite some time.

'It's so sudden.'

Gilbert's gaze was filled with sighs and sadness. On the other hand, Jines' cold expression had a hint of hesitance in it.

'Shouldn't they be cheering and jumping in joy instead? Why do they look like this?' Thales thought, devoid of energy. His mind was filled with what just happened in the stone chamber and what would be happening next.

For some reason, although his heart was heavy at the moment, he could conceal it in his expression. 'Is this the so-called "poker face"?'

Gilbert spoke bitterly, "Please accept my apologies. This was not what I intended... Eckstedt's emergency envoy will be arriving in Constellation tonight. Regardless of whether they are declaring war or making a compromise, at that time you... His Majesty will..."

Gilbert furrowed his brows extremely tightly. He wanted to say something, but sighed deeply and stopped himself.

"Do not waste any more time. The National Conference would be held at three in the afternoon. His Majesty ordered us to bring him into the waiting room before one." Jines cut Gilbert off. Her gaze was obscure and indecipherable.

The former Foreign Affairs Minister and the first-grade female official had changed into dark-colored, somber formal clothing. The eight female servants behind them

held, with flat expressions, eight full salvers as they stood quietly and neatly on both sides of the corridor.

Dong!

The bell chimed for the second time.

Jines walked forward with a complicated expression and led the heavy-hearted Thales into another room. The eight female servants followed them in.

.....

Renaissance Palace, outer palace wall, the first portcullis.

This was where Thales passed by yesterday. The place was barely in order due to the guards' rude yells and merciless berating. Nobles of various ranks and important figures of various occupations formed a long queue there. With varying facial expressions, they all fought for a place to enter Renaissance Palace.

In front of Renaissance Palace, at the position of the first heavy and mottled portcullis, tense guards conducted strict checks and allowed only those who were qualified to attend the conference.

"Me! I am the deputy chairman of the Iron Smelting Guild, and have the right to enter and observe! What? There are twenty-five deputy chairmen in the Iron Smelting Guild? Haih, you wouldn't know this, but they're just there to make up the numbers. I'm the only one who is more special. Let me tell you, look at my black hair and black eyes! Do you understand? Did you know that our family's craftsmanship originated from the Dawn Dynasty in the Far East? It was before the Battle of Eradication... Fine, fine, fine! A man of honor talks things through and does not resort to force! I won't go in, is this not enough?!"

"I am Eros Kata, a fabric merchant who was granted special permission by the royal family! I can go in! See! This is a signed certificate from the late King Aydi, and there is even Prince Midier's signature below it!"

"I also have the invitation Mindis the Third sent to our family years ago here! Although it is a little old, it is still only a hundred and fifty years ago. Hey, don't be violent. I'll leave on my own accord! I'll leave on my own accord!"

"Hey! Punk! Do you still remember me? I am Lazan, a forensic officer at the Central Police Station. We were colleagues for half a year! Are there any seats left in the Hall of Stars?"

"I am on duty here, I don't know. However, my cousin-brother who is a castle guard told me that the big hall is almost half-filled. If you are not a noble who is above the rank a viscount, you won't be able to get in at all!"

"Then, is joining the crowds at Star Plaza our only choice? To listen as those guards pass the decisions of the more influential people down, tier by tier?"

"Let it be. For people of our status, even if we manage to get into the Hall of Stars, we would be sitting at the bottommost and outermost tier, quietly listening to the important people at the uppermost and innermost tier talk. It would be impossible for us to chip in!"

"My God... Those are the heraldry for the Single-Winged Crow and the Sword of the Twin Towers! It's the Kroma and Karabeyan Families' carriage fleet! Make way, quickly! It wouldn't end well for you if you offend them!"

"So what if they are nobles? Nobles also have to obey basic rules... Wait, no, they have to obey the Constellation Provisional Constitution!"

"What sort of joke is that?! They are not normal nobles. Those people are high-ranking vassals who were conferred their titles by the royal families. They have more than a thousand private soldiers, possess vast territories, and have countless subjects... As a forensic officer, you should increase your knowledge. Do you know about the Thirteen Distinguished Families? These people, the royal family, and the Six Great Clans can laugh and joke together..."

"Why do you know this so well?"

"My apologies. I used to work in Kisen Family's manor in the Eastern City District and taught their family's three sons the basic skills for combat..."

Ignoring the jostling of the crowds around him, Count Derek Kroma's cavalier unit and Count Turami Karabeyan's carriage passed through the crowds, managing to reach Renaissance Palace only half an hour after the bell chimed for the second time.

The two counts, Derek Kroma and old Karabeyan, were commonly known as the two

highly ranked nobles among the Thirteen Distinguished Families and the thirteen high-ranking vassals, only second to the royal family and the Six Great Clans. With the Single-Winged Crow flag and the Sword of the Twin Towers' emblem and heraldry, they effortlessly passed through the crowd. They then went past the first outer palace wall and the palace door amid the crowd's low murmurs, accompanied by the guards and the Palace Officer's respectful gazes.

Director Lorbec, who was in the carriage, sighed lightly. "There has never been so many people at the National Conference before. In the Desert War's National Conference, only the leaders of various trades, wealthy businessmen, and those rancid, prestigious scholars attended. Among the Six Great Clans, only two clans attended, and among the thirteen Distinguished Families, only five families were there.

"However, for His Majesty to win over the battle support he needs, the nineteen Noble Families have no choice but to obey the resolution of the National Conference." Karabeyan looked outside the carriage window solemnly. The crowd became bigger and bigger. "The few noble families who refused to obey the resolution were, at some point, besieged by furious citizens, and even encountered difficulties in various fields. Although they are only vassals of the large families, this is not a good sign."

The young Count of Wing Fort, Derek Kroma rode his horse near to the carriage window. His expression was unpleasant. "My Lords, we should hurry up. Even though the nineteen noble families have specific seats in the conference and will not be forced to 'listen' to the conference at Star Plaza under the palace balcony, soon, we might need to fight our way through the populace and those upstart nobles."

.....

On the other hand, the Star Plaza, located right below the Hall of Stars to the northwest of Renaissance Palace, was filled with noise and commotion.

A pioneering effort by the Virtuous King, the National Conference was said to be directed to all citizens. It was the only time when the populace and minor nobles can listen to Constellation's highest powers play their games, and it will be held this evening! Every single topic, discussion and decision would be passed through the entire Star Plaza by specially-assigned people, and all the citizens in the entire capital will be notified!

Genard frowned and looked at the bustling crowd in the entire plaza. He and his city defense squad were temporarily transferred over from the Eastern City District in the morning to maintain the order of Star Plaza together with the police force.

'God have mercy. How would that be possible?' It would be impossible for them, with only a force of approximately one thousand men, to maintain the order of Star Plaza which can accommodate tens of thousands of people. It would even be impossible for Duke John's Starlight Brigade from years ago to maintain any sort of order.

Everybody's gaze was concentrated on the location of the conference above them, the hall with its outdoor area facing the Star Plaza—the Hall of Stars!

Under the bellows of thousands of guards in the plaza and the gigantic city defense ballistae, which have been positioned on Renaissance Palace's walls where they would be on standby to attack, the crowds nonchalantly jostled and exchanged information about the king's sudden decision to hold a National Conference.

"I guess that it will be about the huge explosion in Red Street Market a month ago! Eh, is it because the Blood Bottle Gang was so badly defeated by the Black Street Brotherhood that they became extremely anxious and went insane?"

"Can such a small gang battle alarm the nobility up there?"

"Where did you get this gossip? And a well-presented one at that. What's a Blood Bottle Gang and Black Street Brotherhood? How can there be gangs in the capital city? We are living in a modern society! Our lives now are so pleasant! Why are you spreading these damaging theories? Ah? Looking at your sneaky face, you must be a spy from a foreign power, right?"

"Believe me because I'm definitely right. It must be the Barren Bone people rebelling again! Those tradesmen from Camus Union who are greedier than vampires are definitely behind it! Last month, they detained my family's trade caravan! They wanted to impose on us fifty percent tax! Can you believe that? Fifty out of a hundred percent!"

"Those damned Barren Bone mongrels! Why is the Legendary Wing so soft-hearted? He should learn a thing or two from His Majesty—catch all of them and bury them alive at the Desert God's Altar like Orcs!"

"You are not allowed to insult the Legendary Wing! He's extremely handsome. Indeed,

he is an existence that could unite the entire Western Peninsula with his looks alone!"

"My aunt is a female servant in the house of a viscount in the Morning Star Region. She told me that Eckstedt had an accident, I think it was at the north. Oh yeah, why is their diplomat group not here yet?"

"How is that possible? The 'Fortress Treaty' was signed to take effect for twenty years. Besides that, we have the Fortress Flower that guards the Broken Dragon Fortress well. There are also powerful families in the Northern Territory such as the Arunde family, the Zemunto Family and the Friess Family. It can't possibly be like twelve years ago..."

"Don't forget that the Kingdom's Wrath is still in the capital city! With just him alone, along with that bow of his, he can eradicate twenty thousand people from Eckstedt!"

"Eckstedt probably doesn't even have twenty thousand soldiers throughout its entire country."

"In short, that was what I meant!"

"I think it's most probably northwest's Sera Dukedom. A relative that came to seek refuge with me from faraway said that lately, there is an evil witch spreading a plague there. Their neighbors, Anlenzo Dukedom and Norton Dukedom have shut their borders. Wait, the plague hasn't spread to Constellation yet, right? The nobles from the southwest did not come, right? How about the Tabark Family, Karabeyan, and Lascia? Don't tell me that they are dead from the plague?"

"So, does this mean that the price of herbs would rise? I have to restock immediately!"

"You guys are talking rubbish. My secret source told me that His Majesty will be choosing a person out of the Six Great Clans to become the next king!"

"What? Then how about the Jadestar Royal Family? Our family has the royal family's special permission for furniture trading rights!"

"What else can be done? Can you force His Majesty to give birth to one more son?"

"I think that Count Covendier is not bad! Last year, when he came to inspect the grand bazaar, he held my hand before! With a count like that, how can our country not prosper?"

"But I think that Tabark Family's daughter isn't bad, either! We should learn from Anlenzo Dukedom. Think about it, a beautiful and young queen. Oh God, my heart is about to melt..."

"Stop joking! That's for rural places like Anlenzo and Alumbia! Our mighty Constellation is the successor of the Empire! How can we let a woman become king? I am not discriminating women, but we have to admit to objective differences!"

"Young man, stop making wild guesses over there!"

"I am just concerned with politics!"

"I think that you are a keyboard- cough, cough, I'm sorry, a mouth cannon warrior!"

"You should believe in the Kingdom, believe in His Majesty and believe in the Imperial Conference! How can they not know something that even you know?"

.....

Thales slowly stood and looked at the young noble in the mirror who wore luxurious clothing and a cold expression.

His hair was no longer messy, but neatly cut and combed into a hairstyle that was simple yet pleasant, making him look alert and handsome.

Jines even clipped on a subtly sparkling crystal stone earring on his left ear without regards for his facial expression.

He had on a long-sleeved jacket that was made thicker and decorated with dark-blue glittering crystals. Coupled with a white undershirt, cuffs that were nicely buttoned up with Crystal Drops, and a specially tailored macramé mantle. His attire made his originally frail body look straight and tall.

He raised his hands. His pure white, leather gloves were well-fitted and shiny. It seemed to give more depth to his every move.

The noble, black slacks, paired with a belt buckle styled in the fashion of stars, along with the expensive leather boots that boosted his height by two inches, allowed him to walk with the gracefulness of nobles.

A nine-pointed star emblem which signified the Jadestar Family was sewn on the back of Thales' clothes, and a gold-and-silver nine-pointed star brooch was clipped on his chest. They sparkled under the light.

The female servants sprayed a bit of cologne on him. It was almost undetectable, but made his scent closer to that of the upper-class society.

Thales chuckled bitterly and sighed 'Haih. Fashionable clothing, graceful manners, established etiquette and limited knowledge. These are the best tools to segregate and divide people into different social statuses. This is the circle of nobles. This damned, evil, culture.'

Even Jines and Gilbert, who were observing from the side, could not help but nod.

Jines sighed, her tone was bitter. "It is almost time. Kessel- His Majesty hopes that you would go in earlier."

Thales knew that their emotions were not quite right. However, since he was already there... He cleared all thoughts from his mind and slowly left with Gilbert and Jines.

"I need to get a final confirmation from you on some things."

Thales raised his head and looked at Gilbert.

"Your name- I mean, His Majesty originally planned to give you a name that is more suitable for the 'Jadestar Tradition', such as John and Midier, or Kessel and Tormond. After all, the name Thales is one used by the populace. It will be appearing in the royal pedigree for the first time... and will allow those who are observant to find out about your past..."

Thales turned his head back and while walking forward, spoke without changing his expression, "Thales."

"What?"

"I want to be called Thales."

'I will not change my name. Those past experiences... I will not forget, nor forsake any of them.'

Staring at the endlessly long corridor, Thales clenched his fists tightly and paid no heed to Gilbert's hesitant gaze.

"Haih... I shall follow your will." Under Jines' murderous gaze, Gilbert sighed.

It was a very long corridor. Thales did not bat an eyelash. He took a few dozen steps forward and stopped. There was a large black door in front of him.

"This is the Hall of Stars. You would be going into the dark, innermost room. You do not have to be nervous. When it is time, I will open the door, and you just have to do as you were told beforehand." Gilbert lowered his head as he spoke, but he immediately looked at one side of the door. The middle-aged noble put on a puzzled expression.

"Aida? At this time, you should be beside His Majesty and protecting him!"

Thales looked ahead, a petite figure was leaning against one side of the door.

'It's her.' Thales could recognize her as the cloaked woman from yesterday who led the Royal Guards and saved him from Zayen. Her face was still covered by the cloak and could not be seen under the dim lighting.

The cloaked woman had her arms crossed as she got up from the wall she was leaning on. "Hey, kid, that masked guy asked me to give you this gift on his behalf."

A young, pleasant, and lively voice rang as the cloaked woman passed him something.

Thales was stunned. He took it and did not even pay attention to the cloaked woman's overly fair, smooth, and supple skin.

It was a black dagger-sheath, and it came with a buckled leather strap. Words were engraved on one side: 'A King does not gain respect by virtue of his bloodline.'

Thales resisted the urge to subconsciously touch his chest. With complicated emotions, he pulled out JC's dagger from his belt and inserted it into the sheath—the size was just right.

"Thank you- Yodel... is he well?" Thales calmed down his breath and buckled the sheathed dagger onto his belt.

"Don't worry. That sort of person won't die for now." The cloaked woman chuckled lightly. "I understand him very well."

Thales nodded and walked past her, standing still in front of the door.

Looking at the black stone door in front of him, the boy clenched his teeth.

'Only one more step.'

Behind him, Gilbert's frown became deeper and deeper while Jines bit hard on her bottom lip. On the other hand, the cloaked woman exercised her neck nonchalantly.

Thales did not turn. He just gazed at the stone-gray floor before him and faintly said, "Gilbert, will I never be able to turn back after taking this step?"

Gilbert was stunned, but Thales did not plan to let him answer.

The boy raised his head and forced a smile with difficulty. "No... Perhaps, when I first opened my eyes in this world, there was already no turning back. I can only keep walking forward."

Having heard this, Jines' gaze became hesitant and hard to understand. She extended her hand, but was pulled back by Gilbert who shook his head beside her.

"Do not worry, be a little happier. This is a good thing, Sir Gilbert, Madam Jines, and... this cloaked lady. A good person once told me to..."

Illuminated by the Everlasting Lamps with sunlight that shone in from the windows on both sides of the corridor, Thales turned around. He stuck out his thumb and cracked a bright smile. "...just take it as another game."

Before the other three could react, Thales pushed the door open and walked inside.

A gust of cold air rushed past the large stone door. The lighting ahead was dim, and it seemed as if there was endless darkness.

Thales' figure disappeared amid that darkness.

Gilbert lowered his head as he sighed. Jines turned her head and did not say anything. Only the woman in the cloak happily snapped her fingers. "Aha, I like this kid."

Jines raised her head and chuckled bitterly and helplessly, her face was filled with sadness and sympathy. "True, this kid... He is only a child. How can he shoulder such a heavy burden and... future?"

There was a period of silence, until a raspy voice suddenly spoke up, "He can."

The woman in the cloak stuck out her chin. "Such fast recovery."

Gilbert and Jines looked behind them in surprise. There, the Masked Protector's silhouette appeared out of thin air.

However, weirdly, Yodel's figure was floating about and extremely blurry, as if covered by a veil made of air.

The bleary-figured Yodel spoke firmly, "He can shoulder those sorts of responsibilities. I understand him well. He has special qualities that no one else in this world has—not humans, not Gods, not demons. Not even Mystics."

There was another period of silence.

Gilbert shook his head and snorted lightly. He then tipped his hat in salutation. "I am sorry for excusing myself. The National Conference is only two hours away. Madam Jines, we should be seeing His Majesty."

Jines nodded and left together with Gilbert.

The two figures disappeared at the corridor some distance away as their footsteps faded away.

There were only the Masked Protector and the cloaked woman left.

"Your chest was pierced by three crossbow arrows laced with highly poisonous Vine Blue Grass. It has only been a night, and it's impossible that you are able to stand up." The cloaked woman looked at the bleary-figured Yodel and sighed loudly. "Did you make a deal with that mask again? I have warned you many times! The collapse of the Ancient Elf Kingdom is not unrelated to that mask! And you..."

"What price did you pay this time?"

Yodel did not answer, he only stayed silent and caressed the purple mask on his face.

"No matter what price I paid," Yodel's figure slowly disappeared, and only his raspy voice remained. "It cannot compare to one ten-thousandth of the price that child will have to pay."

Chapter 58

The Warlords' Chess Game (One)

Thales was not concerned with anything else. He walked into the dark room in rapt concentration.

The buzzing sound commonly heard from crowds rang from outside the dark room. It was noisy and disturbing.

This reminded him of the football team he used to support in his past life. This is probably similar to the feeling one got when they first walk into the stadium during a live match.

Amid the buzzing sounds outside the dark room, a young and jovial male voice suddenly said, "Hey, old man! Director Lorbec! I am here, here! Hey, Sir, you look a little familiar.

"Wait- You are Kroma Family's... cousin Derek! Oh God, I have not seen you for so many years. What happened to your face? Kasa and Gina must be crying!"

Thales suddenly regained his attention and took a few steps forward. He looked outside through the one-way glass in the dark room. Indeed, the entire Hall of Stars was below him.

The Hall of Stars was an oval-shaped, semi open-air hall. It was at least more than ten meters tall and could accommodate at least a thousand people. The side facing Star Plaza had a protruding balcony instead of a wall. This made the hall look like an irregularly shaped cylinder with one lateral side chopped off at a slanted angle, or rather, like a half-covered cylindrical garbage shovel. Having thought of this, Thales could not help but flash a smile.

At that moment, the hall was already half-full. There were at least a few hundred people in it. Some people were sitting, and some were standing.

The nearer it was to the center of the hall, the sparser the crowd. Their clothes seemed luxurious, they were quiet and composed, and most of them had seats. These were the

nobles.

There was a large round table in the middle of the hall that was surrounded by seven stone chairs of obviously different specifications.

Among the unique stone chairs was the throne. The six stone chairs surrounding it belonged to the six guardian dukes. There were thirteen other stone chairs on the periphery of the six stone chairs. They formed a large semicircle and belonged to the Thirteen Distinguished Families.

The six stone chairs were still empty, but some of the thirteen stone chairs were already occupied. The occupants were all men ranging from twenty to sixty years old, and bore different emblems and symbols. Their expressions varied too. There were a few nervous looking attendants behind every seat.

The voice he heard just now originated from the stone chairs belonging to the Thirteen Distinguished Families. A blonde, handsome man wearing an astral blue police uniform stood behind one of the stone chairs. He had a nice-looking face with deep set features. Compared to the fairly feminine Asda and the 'pretty face' Istrone, he appeared more energetic and strong.

However, the handsome man was being hit hard on the head with a staff by a gray-haired middle-aged noble who looked extremely angry.

The middle-aged noble's clothing had a symbol of two tall towers and a long sword on it.

"Kohen Karabeyan, what happened to your noble upbringing? Do you know how to talk like a human! Derek is not only your cousin-brother, but also the head of the Kroma Family—one of the thirteen Distinguished Families! He is the Suzerain of Wing Fort and a count of the kingdom! Show some respect!"

With a face filled with shock, Thales stared at the kingdom's police officer, Kohen Karabeyan, as he massaged his head with clenched teeth and growled at his father, "Old man, the Stage of Eradication is in front of us anyway! Hit me one more time, and we will battle up there!"

A lot of people turned their head towards their direction, but seeing that it was the seat of one of the Thirteen Distinguished Families, they all shook their heads and ignored the commotion.

'Why is this noble family so... weird?'

"Haha, Kohen and I know each other really well. This shows how close we are..." Derek seemed to know his uncle and cousin-brother's daily routine. He immediately waved his hand to signal that there was nothing to fear. On the other hand, Lorbec frantically pulled the old Count Karabeyan, preventing him from furiously waving the staff for a second time.

"By the way, Kohen, even though you are the eldest son of the Karabeyan Family... how did you manage to be let in before your father arrived?" The director of the Western City Police Station, Lorbec Deira immediately changed the topic.

"I am not very sure either." Kohen scratched his head and frowned. "I only recovered from the injury I sustained in Red Street Market a few days ago—old man, put down your staff, we'll talk about this at home—and received an order to be on duty. As soon as I reached the door of Renaissance Palace, seeing that I'm one of them, the people from the city defense team and the police station let me in. Hearing that I'm a Karabeyan, the guards in the palace immediately led me into the Hall of Stars."

Having heard this, his father, Count Karabeyan, the Suzerain of Walla, was stunned.

The old count did not enquire further. Both he and Derek Kroma sat on their respective stone chairs. A few attending knights, Kohen, and Lorbec stood behind him.

Listening to their conversation, Thales made a rough guess that those two families were part of the Thirteen Distinguished Families.

At that moment, the noisy crowd suddenly became silent. Thales' gaze turned towards the other direction.

A distance away, two memorable figures stepped into the Hall of Stars. They were flanked by two teams of attendants as they stepped on the blue star streaked carpet.

The people in front of them automatically moved aside. Some of them bowed in greeting, and others were whispering.

Among the two figures, a plump and rich-looking old man smiled good-naturedly, occasionally responding to those around him. Embroidered on his back was a sword and a shield that were crossed against the background of a red sun.

That was the kingdom's Prime Minister, the Suzerain of Splendid Port City and the Guardian Duke of the Eastern Sea, Bob Cullen.

Beside him, another fierce-looking middle-aged noble in uniform took huge strides forward. His expression was cold and he did not look around at all.

The middle-aged noble wore a chain armor as his upper garment. It could be clearly seen that on his chest, there was a sharp-eyed falcon, spreading its wings against a white background.

He was the Suzerain of Cold Castle and the Guardian Duke of the Northern Territory, Val Arunde.

The Sun Sword and Shield, and the White-Backed Flying Falcon. Their symbols represented the two most powerful families among the Six Great Clans.

"National Conference? This is practically a mockery!"

The Duke of the Northern Territory, Val, had a scar on his chin. His expression was of discontent and he did not bother controlling his volume. He spoke furiously to the plump old man beside him.

"He personally signed and issued a general edict! And then he suddenly... involved the populace in this. This is practically a betrayal! As the Prime Minister, you should stop him!"

Around them, all the nobles of minor nobility and intermediate nobility classes who heard the contents of their conversation immediately lowered their heads or turned and left.

Well, excuse them. Who would dare to listen as members of the six Great Guardian Dukes accuse the Supreme King of Constellation?!

The white-haired, jolly and plump Guardian Duke of the Eastern Sea puffed his ruddy cheeks. Wearing an expensive mink skin shawl, he tapped his large, swelled up belly. He spoke helplessly, "Although I do not find it appropriate either, I am unable to stop it as it is His Majesty's will."

Val snorted in discontent. He was not satisfied with the Prime Minister's excuse. 'A fat old man who sits on the fence and has no standing of his own. How did he become

known as the "Sword of the Gulf" when he was young?'

As they walked past the thirteen stone chairs, all the seated nobles stood up and bowed respectfully, including the old Karabeyan and young Kroma.

"Even though he is the king we have sworn fealty to, he should not insult us like this!" Val nimbly took off his cape and gave it to an attendant behind him who was obviously a warrior. He then brazenly sat down on his seat.

Val Arunde had experienced many things in life. On the chain armor he wore was the flying falcon on white. It was embroidered on the chest, and it appeared extremely cold. He propped up his left hand in an extravagant manner, and his being exuded the type of sharpness and isolated aura only found in Northlanders.

He did not hide his disdain towards the king at all. "I really feel like knocking out that bastard's front teeth! Just like I did forty years ago!"

Behind his father's seat, Kohen spoke in a low voice, "Even if he is the Duke of the northern Territory, how can he speak about His Majesty like this without hiding it at all?"

"If you grew up with His Majesty since you were young, and almost married your sister to him," Count Karabeyan answered in a whisper, "You can talk about His Majesty like this too."

The old Duke Cullen sighed lightly as he shakily sat down on one of the six stone chairs with the help of his attendant. "Be careful with your words. Soon, the guards will start relaying the messages downwards. At that time, every single sentence spoken from these twenty stone chairs will be passed down to Star Plaza. He is, after all, our king! We can only hope that our remonstrance is useful."

'These Northlanders... it's been fifty years, but they show no improvement at all.' In his heart, the old duke shook his head.

Suddenly, there was a surging uproar. The noises composed of the murmurs from the crowd became louder and louder!

Gilbert's familiar voice rang out, "In the name of the Supreme King of Constellation, Kessel Jadestar..."

"Subjects of the kingdom, bow down to your king!"

Thales raised his brows. A group of people entered the Hall of Stars through another side door.

Like roaring waves, the people in the crowds kneeled on a one knee, only standing up after the king was a distance away.

The robust Kessel the Fifth was still holding his scepter in one hand. His expression was cold and authoritative as he stepped into the Hall of Stars. Eight Royal Guards kept a tight watch behind him.

The king immediately became the center of attention. Even though the people were kneeling, the crowd's murmurs did not reduce. Instead, they became louder.

The Duke of Eastern Sea tapped his plump cheeks and spoke smilingly, "His Majesty is here. Why don't you raise your suggestion to him personally?"

"Hmph." The Duke of the Northern Territory snorted in disdain. "As if he will listen to me."

King Kessel walked towards his stone chair in huge strides. At that moment, he suddenly raised his head, and whether intentionally or not, glanced towards the position of the dark room.

Thales clenched his fist slightly. He regulated his breathing and calmed his mood.

'Calm down, Thales, the real show has not yet begun.'

A group of people led by Gilbert followed closely behind the Iron Fist King's cape. Among them was the mature and tall Jines.

It was only then did Thales see that Gilbert's family emblem was that of an open book.

The large-bellied Duke Cullen said with a smile, "Ah, it's Constellation's Cunning Fox, Count Caso. Together with Count Godwin, Viscount Kenney, Baron Gales and Lord Krapen... all of them are the kingdom's future... Our clever and wise female official, Madam Jines is with us, too."

Seated on his stone chair, Val shook his head in disdain. "People from the king's

partisan. Hopefully, they will soon understand that the best way to support their king would be to think of ways to stop him from doing crazy things. That is the way to go rather than use every conceivable method to attack the nineteen noble families who are the backbone of the kingdom. As for that bitch, every single second of her being in the palace is an insult to the Arunde Family."

"Woohoo-"

"The king- the king-"

At that moment, an even louder cheer rang from outside into the Hall of Stars! The hall was immediately filled with a deafening roar that boomed from far away.

On one hand, many of the nobles' expressions changed. On the other hand, members of the populace who have some status whispered into each other's ears excitedly. Some even cheered along.

Thales came to a realization. 'It was the crowd outside on Star Plaza cheering.'

Duke Cullen pouted his lips. "I suppose that the guards have already begun passing down the messages to the plaza?"

Val turned his head, his face was pale. Kessel went in front of the thirteen stone chairs and looked at his vassals. The members of the Thirteen Distinguished Families rose and lined up before him. They all kneeled down on one knee to show their loyalty.

Expressionlessly, Kessel extended his right hand towards a noble—whose emblem was the five-pointed star—for him to kiss the ring on his finger.

The king said plainly, "Bern Talon, you are the first one. You are still the first one. You have always been the first one."

"Blood is thicker than water, Your Majesty. The Talon Family is a branch of the Jadestar Family, just like how the five-pointed star will always be part of the nine-pointed star."

Kessel's brow furrowed slightly, but he nodded and walked towards the next noble. His authoritative voice reverberated, making every gaze focus on him. "Smith Sorel, I heard that you and your territory fervently oppose the 'Tax Exemption for the Opening Up of Border Counties'?"

"Of course, Your Majesty!" The middle-aged noble, who had a golden sun symbol on his clothing, kissed the king's ring and shook his head firmly. "How can I allow the nobles' blood to be tarnished?"

Kessel snorted softly.

The king extended his hand towards a noble who had a black lion—baring its fangs and brandishing its claws—embroidered on his chest. "Lewis Bozdorf, the Skillful Black Lion, would he still fight for the pride?"

The noble kissed the king's ring and smiled meaningfully. He gave a crafty reply, "I swear I will fight to my death, Your Majesty. If the alpha lion was still smart and brave, he will always care for the pride."

Kessel nodded and continued walking.

Kessel walked towards Count Karabeyan with a nostalgic expression, "Turami Karabeyan, I remember that you used to be part of the Starlight Brigade, risking your life for John."

Count Karabeyan spoke seriously, kissing the king's ring, "I risked my life for my homeland. Everything is for the peace of Constellation."

Deep in thought, Kessel nodded, then continued walking. "Derek Kroma, you look smarter than your father," he said to the young Derek in a profound manner, "The crow who wanted to save his master even though he only had one wing. Is he still at Wing Fort?"

Derek Kroma—who had a single-winged crow tattooed on his body—spoke cleverly with a neutral face. He kissed the king's ring. "That crow owes his life to his master, and was also raised by his master. That is why he risks his life to rescue his master. Of course, the crow forever belongs to Wing Fort."

Kessel tapped his shoulder and walked towards the next noble—who was half-bald—and extended his right hand. "Hodge Dagestan."

This noble had two long swords, positioned against each other in the form of a cross, embroidered on his clothing. Kessel coldly said, "I still remember that your clan's motto is, 'Forward or backward, survive or fall'. This time, have your people decided on which direction to go?"

The half balding Hodge Dagestan lowered his head to kiss the king's ring, making his expression unclear. "There has always been only one direction. However, people who stand too tall often cannot see it clearly."

Kessel snorted furiously and coldly, not bothering to hide his dissatisfaction towards the other person at all.

This time, the king extended both hands towards two resolute and steadfast nobles. One had a white bear as his symbol, and the other a steel-colored wall. "Wilkos Zemunto, Borette Friess, can Overwatch City and Lonely Old Tower endure the cold wind from the north?"

Wilkos Zemunto, who had a full beard, kissed the king's ring and spoke heroically, "Cold wind? For Constellation, Overwatch City can even block the Great Dragon's flames of fury!"

The bald Borette Friess refused to seem inferior. He kissed the ring with blazing eyes. "Even though Lonely Old Tower stands in cold and roaring winds, no matter how bitterly cold it gets, the furnace fire in the tower will always burn."

Under the king's signal, the two northern nobles slowly stood up.

Kessel walked past all members of the thirteen Distinguished Families who were present, and headed towards the two Dukes.

He waved his hands and stopped Bob Cullen, who was swaying as he tried to stand up. "Forget about it, Prime Minister. Your stomach is practically heavier than my scepter."

The Duke of Eastern Sea was smiling as though he could not understand the meaning behind Kessel's words. He only nodded and thanked the king.

Next to him, Jines took off Kessel's cape so that he could sit comfortably on the highest stone chair.

Kessel glanced at Val, then shook his head, not at all bothered by his attitude. "As for you, I suppose that your knees are afflicted with a strange illness which makes them unable to bend?"

Val Arunde spoke carelessly, his gaze burned with fury. "Yes, when I am facing Eckstedt and the crown of Constellation, I will get this illness!"

Kessel shook his head. "It has been forty years and your sense of humor has not yet improved."

After the Ceremony of Allegiance, which carried a somewhat profound meaning both publicly and privately, the nobles from the Thirteen Distinguished Families returned to their seats.

Gilbert reported with a solemn expression, "Out of the six Guardian Dukes, two are present. Out of the Thirteen Distinguished Families, eight are present. Your Majesty?"

"Wait for a while longer," Kessel spoke steadily.

A deafening cheer rang once again from Star Plaza.

Amid the cheering, Val scornfully said, "All of a sudden, you announced that the Higher Parliament Conference has turned into a National Conference, and you even wanted to hold it at an earlier time. How many noble families, who live too far away, do you think would make it in time? At least, it would be impossible for Blade City's Tabark family!"

Kessel shook his head. His face was expressionless, "This is a chess game between the warlords of Constellation. The players were destined to participate long ago, and the match had also started long ago."

"It seems that the crown has not only made you king, but also a horrible bard." Val Arunde spoke indignantly, clenching his teeth so hard that it made grating sounds. Only the Duke of Eastern Sea smoothed things over with a smile.

In the dark room, Thales suddenly felt his heart clench. He saw a black-robed old man who also held a cane, standing at the back of the 'king's partisan'. Everyone around tried to avoid the old man, except for a young man who trailed behind him. The young man was dressed in a similarly plain white robe.

'That's... '

"Morat Hansen. Why is he here too?" Lord Lorbec, who was beside Kohen, furrowed his brows as he watched the black-robed figure. "My whole body shivers when I see that poisonous snake."

"He is our kingdom's Chief of Intelligence, and a non-voting delegate of the Imperial

Conference, it's only natural that he has to come." Kohen furrowed his brows, too. He obviously did not like that person. "However, director, if we go by what you just said, His Majesty and the Prime Minister, who see him every day, should have frozen to death a long time ago... hmm?

"That's...?"

Under his father and the director's surprised gaze, the blond haired police officer, Kohen Karabeyan, took quick steps forward. With a furious and indignant expression, he walked towards...

The 'Black Prophet', Morat Hansen!

Chapter 59

The Warlords' Chess Game (Two)

Under the watchful eyes of the crowd, Kohen strode towards the young man behind the Black Prophet.

"Raphael!"

The nobles surrounding the thirteen stone seats turned their gazes towards Kohen. The man held back the emotions that he could hardly contain and shouted at the young man, "Raphael Lindbergh!"

The young man dressed in a white robe also saw Kohen striding towards him. He gave a frivolous smile and murmured into Morat's ear before walking towards Kohen.

"You went missing for three years!" Even the two dukes and the king who was sitting high on his throne could notice Kohen's flaming rage.

"Kohen!" The young man's voice was lively and bright, and it was a voice that could arouse fondness from others, just like his appearance. He opened his arms wide open towards Kohen. "You're still so energetic!"

Kohen brusquely slapped Raphael's arm away from him. "Why did you leave without a single notice?"

He glanced at the king's partisans and also Lord Morat Hansen, who stood by himself at the side with no one approaching him. Kohen's voice was tinted with disbelief. "You're following 'the Black Prophet' now? Do you know how much his hands are stained with blood and evil deeds...?"

Raphael laughed, "That's a misconception from the entire world. Sir Hansen contributed greatly for Constellation. He sacrificed a tremendous lot, even more so than any of the other nobles right here with us."

Kohen was stunned and for a moment, he could not find any phrases to refute, so he said, "We can talk about this later. What on earth did you do during these past three

years...?"

"Stayed by Sir Hansen's side, listened and followed his teachings." Raphael still looked as nonchalant and relaxed as ever.

"Teachings?" Kohen was momentarily stunned, the surprised look on his face was then taken over by indignation. "This is your reason? You dumped Miranda for three years for no reason! And all of it was because you went running to that venomous snake to listen to his teachings?"

"Miss Miranda?" Raphael suddenly became cold and callous, gently crossing his arms across his chest.

"She was never mine, so how can you claim that I dumped her?"

Kohen stared in utter disbelief at his old friend, as if this was the first time he knew Raphael.

"Are you crazy? Miranda was still waiting for you to find—"

"Please ask her to get rid of all those unrealistic thoughts. It's for her own good."

Kohen widened his eyes and sighed, "If you still think you're not worthy enough for her, I can tell you right now that she doesn't care..."

Raphael coldly cut Kohen off, "That's the past. People change. I really liked her in the past, but now, I don't like her anymore, period."

The young man in white noticed the gazes from the people on the six stone seats, and he whispered, "This is not the right place to catch up on old times. Pardon me, I must leave."

But as he was turning to leave, his shoulder was tightly grabbed by Kohen.

Kohen contained his boiling anger. "You have yet finished what you need to say. Damn it! What's wrong with you! It's impossible for a person to change so quickly!"

Raphael, his expression still cold and callous, grabbed Kohen's hand. "That is because you failed to actually see my true colors, the Sword of the Twin Towers' heir, Officer Karabeyan."

Kohen held onto Raphael's shoulder with brute strength, his eyes were burning with flames of anger and bewilderment. He knew the young man in front of him was a genius with eidetic memory in the Tower of Eradication. Among the cohorts in the Tower, he was even the first to awaken his Power of Eradication. He was also the runner-up in the final appraisal before they left the tower. He only came in second to Miranda, and he even scored a place higher than Kohen himself!

He was a Swordsman of Eradication with a promising and boundless future!

But why—

With a determined look, Kohen clenched his teeth and said, "The Raphael I know would never make a choice like this! That day after you left the tower, you... we lost all news about you after that... what happened?"

'What happened?'

Raphael sneered. "I got a good look at the real world."

The next second, a freezing, cold, chaotic Power of Eradication engulfed Kohen's hand, which was seized by Raphael. It immediately evoked the starry blue Power of Eradication within him to put up a violent resistance against it!

The surging waves of the Power of Eradication forced him to let go, but Kohen did not care about this. What he cared about was the other thing.

Kohen glanced at his old friend in complete astonishment as he asked in disbelief, "Raphael, your... your Power of Eradication... I clearly remembered it was 'Sword of Baptism's Death', but why... why did it change to this?"

Raphael raised his eyebrow and flashed a complicated smile, he replied briskly, "Compared to the original me—I have become better."

Kohen could only stare at Raphael, dumbfounded, watching his old friend from the Tower of Eradication turn his back on him without hesitation or reluctance to part.

With his back towards Kohen, Raphael turned his head sideways slightly to give him a cold look, "A word of advice, Kohen Karabeyan, be careful today." Raphael coldly walked back towards Morat Hansen's side.

The police officer furrowed his brows and clenched his fist. His eyes were filled with complex emotions and astonishment.

'That feeling... could it be... '

The shadow of the sword and the light from the sword at Red Street Market that night emerged before Kohen's eyes. That swordsman in the red and black attire, with his frenzied sword style that was murderous and indomitable.

And more importantly, his violent and uncontrollable Power of Eradication.

Kohen took in a deep breath. 'It can't be.'

After a few seconds, he exhaled and slowly walked back to his father's side. "Don't ask."

With anger and confusion boiling in him, Kohen concluded with the two words when he faced his father and the director's puzzled stares.

When the thirteen Distinguished Families' Javea Family, with the symbol of the Sun-Shooting Bow; Almond Family, with their use of deep blue waves as their emblem; and also Lascia Family, with the four-winged monitor lizard, arrived at the scene, the crowd was once again in an uproar.

But it was nothing compared to later when the Covendier Family arrived—there was more enthusiasm for their arrival.

Thales, who was in the dark compartment, spotted the person who caused the uproar from the crowd with his eagle-like vision.

The mild-mannered and amiable Suzerain of Jade City, the Guardian Duke of the South Coast, Zayen Covendier, beside an old man with a dignified posture, smiled and nodded towards the surrounding people as they strolled along the path slowly.

As he was approaching the thirteen stone seats, a number of nobles stood up and bowed to pay their respects. Zayen patiently returned their greetings one by one.

Zayen walked to the utmost centre of the stone seats, kneeled down on one knee in front of the expressionless Kessel the Fifth, and kissed the ring on his hand.

Kessel furrowed his brows slightly. "Covendier, I heard that you had a small misunderstanding with the Royal Guards yesterday."

Zayen gave a captivating smile. "It was only a small matter, you do not have to trouble yourself over this, Your Majesty."

Kessel nodded as he glanced meaningfully at Zayen's smile. "Let us hope that today will be the same."

Zayen paused slightly. Indeed, there must be something that went wrong. It should be the scene where the nobles forced the appointment of an heir, but His Majesty seemed prepared.

The Royal Guards passed down the message from one tier to the subsequent tier, and so the earth-shaking shouts of cheers could be heard from the bottom upwards.

"Woo! Woo!"

"Coven- Covendier!"

"Iris Flowers- Tricolor Iris Flowers!"

Thales' heart sank. 'The Duke of Tricolor Iris Flowers was this popular?'

While listening to the thunderous cheers below Renaissance Palace, the young duke maintained his composure as he steadily stood up. The butler silently held his cape from behind him.

Zayen sat on one of the six stone seats and smiled at the other two dukes, who each had a different expression on their faces.

The smiling Duke Bob Cullen raised his hand, and introduced the young man to the cold looking 'Iron Eagle', "Val, this is the young Zayen—"

While scrutinizing Zayen with a cold look, the Duke of the Northern Territory nonchalantly cut off the fat duke, "Iris Flowers... You are the youngest Duke of Constellation?"

Duke Cullen, who was interrupted earlier, did not take any offence as he smiled and rubbed his belly.

Zayen was stunned. He felt that the other party's gaze was too sharp for him to meet his gaze.

'This is Val the "Iron Eagle"? He seems just as the rumors described him to be... But I wonder what his reaction would be when Eckstedt's soldiers focus on the Northern Territory... '

Zayen laughed gently and bowed slightly with his hand on his chest. "A pleasure to meet you, the Master of White Eagle, Duke Arunde. Pardon me for not daring to accept the title of the youngest duke. According to what I know, Tabark Family's master is much younger than I."

Val's expression did not change and he spoke in a manner that allowed no disagreement, "It is fine. Since you are already seated in this position, it means that you already have your right to enter this game."

At this moment, a disharmonious, piercing noise made its way through the crowd and interrupted the conversation of almost half the hall.

Thales heard an unexpected sharp voice come from another side door and pass through the crowd. "What a shame... Every time I step into this city, this alleged Royal Capital..."

The crowd dispersed, the nobles' gazes were complicated, some with hatred and some with excitement.

"I can smell that particular scent of the people from the city... That stench of luxury and privilege... makes me want to puke..."

The person with the sharp voice limped across the carpet towards the nobles, alongside his entourage.

"...just like the dying old man who sits in office and does nothing but receives his pay, and also the immature pretty-boy who actually made it to the six dukes' thrones."

His speech caused a commotion from many of the nobles.

Above the six stone seats, Zayen's expression froze whereas the plump Duke Cullen laughed. Val Arunde narrowed his eyes and clenched his fist tightly.

Thales discovered to his surprise that the person walking towards the venue was a sparse-haired, middle-aged man with a pale yet haggard complexion. Even a part of his lips had sunk inwards, making him look as if he lost the upper row of his teeth. The only sign that proved that he was a living human being was his eyes, which were incisive and full of life.

One of his legs was clearly crippled. With the help of a crutch, he paced one step at a time onto the starry blue carpet, and walked towards the six stone seats.

Val Arunde's knuckles cracked as he clenched his fist and looked disdainfully at the approaching man. "It has been years since we last met, you damned old man."

Kessel the Fifth gave a ruminating smile from his throne. "Cyril! It is good that you are here! Otherwise, the title of 'the most unpopular person' in this meeting would be taken by our Duke Arunde."

The Northern Territory Duke snorted.

"Hahahahaha..."

The haggard middle-aged man, the Suzerain of the Ruins, the Guardian Duke of the Western Desert, Cyril Fakenhaz, emitted a creepily long, piercing laugh as he hobbled his way before the king. With one hand still holding on to his crutch, he kneeled down to kiss the king's ring. With his sharp and chilly voice, he said, "Fakenhaz would never be absent, Your Majesty."

All three of the dukes at the scene had different emotions displayed on their faces but had nonetheless kept quiet.

Thales furrowed his brows. The moment Cyril bowed down, a creepy image of a skull could be seen on his blood-red cape, and the skull had four eye sockets.

Fakenhaz, the family who used the Four-Eyed Skull as their emblem, had always been mysterious. The family was located at the Barren Bone Tribe, just opposite the Western Desert, and they were the first in line in the battle against the Orcs.

"It's already three o'clock. Four out of six dukes and eleven out of thirteen nobles have already arrived. Your Majesty, we can begin." Gilbert looked around the entire hall and nodded solemnly towards Kessel.

Kessel nodded his head slightly without a word.

He flipped the scepter he was holding in his hand into the air and then hit it hard against the ground.

Thump!

For some unknown reason, the rumbling noise travelled through the whole hall from Thales's perception, as if it struck hard against the people's hearts.

The sound in the hall slowly faded.

"Everyone, it is time..."

Kessel's sonorous, dignified voice spread crystal clear throughout the hall due to the special design of the Hall of Stars.

"Constellation's National Conference of year 672 in the Calender of Eradication... will begin now."

The commotion within the Hall of Stars immediately fell into silence. Everyone was gazing at the center, where a strange silence had fallen among the King, four dukes and eleven counts.

It lasted until the guard passed the King's message to the outside of the hall.

And so, beneath Renaissance Palace, the Star Plaza once again exploded with cheers and excitement, but it was completely different from what the capital's citizens imagined.

The National Conference should have started with one noble questioning the National Conference itself and also by the thirteen Distinguished Families exposing each other's misdeeds and attacking each other.

"Sorel, what is the meaning of this?" Bern Talon—the noble of the five-pointed star, a noble in his prime years, and the distant relative of the Jadestar Royal Family—angrily questioned.

"Do you doubt His Majesty's authority in convening the National Conference?"

"I do not doubt His Majesty's authority. He is the King, of course he can do anything he wants and pleases!"

Smith Sorel—with the Golden Sun as his emblem, was the legitimate doubter of the National Conference, and the objector of the 'Tax Exemption for the Opening up of Border Counties'—refuted brusquely, "What I am questioning is if he still reserves the minimum respect that all nineteen noble families deserve!"

King Kessel gently stroked his scepter. He remained silent, as if he did not hear a single word.

Count Sorel snorted and continued, "What we received was the General Edict of Constellation! It was supposed to be about brilliant nobles who all come together to Higher Parliament to determine Constellation's future! It is not supposed to be this unconstrained mess of a conference where anyone can come and go as they wish!"

Voices of protest could be heard from the surrounding people but were immediately subdued by the voices of the nobles in the hall center, and also by the angry glances from the guards.

Count Lewis Bozdorf, who had just hinted a certain thing by saying that "if the alpha lion was still smart and brave" rubbed his stubbly chin while he said in a contemplative tone, "Makes sense. Under this situation, nothing good can be achieved regardless of what will be discussed. Not to mention that big event... The Higher Parliament would be more suitable.

"We should immediately move to the smaller meeting room."

The Northern Count with the White Bear as his symbol, the Mayor of Overwatch City coldly said, "Bozdorf, what you meant was that we should disband, and then have a small meeting of just nineteen people? We have already come this far, and you are still hooked on this matter? Did your mother forget to give you a brain when she was giving birth to you?"

In the great hall, everyone was noisily rambling about this undisguised insult! Even Duke Cullen and Zayen who were sitting upon the six stone seats furrowed their brows.

Only the Duke of the Northern Territory scoffed. Bozdorf was not enraged by the comment as he chuckled, "My mother has a great memory, so she probably did not

forget that. However, Count Zemunto, you—"

His speech was interrupted by another noble from the Northern Territory.

"Shut up, Black Lion, we are not really concerned about your mother, or the presence of your brain."

Count Friess, the Suzerain of the Lonely Old Tower, who had the iron-colored long wall as his symbol, and who also came from the north, tapped rhythmically against the stone seat. With his face in a steely color, he said indifferently, "The Southern Royal Capital is meant to be used to handle that great event! What we care about is Constellation's safety. But you Southerners, you sons of b*tches, are still concerned over the accuracy of titles in the invitations you obtained?"

"The safety of Constellation?" Count Hodge Dagestan—who made a sarcastic remark earlier about him not being able to see the king clearly because he was standing too high up—also cut into the conversation. He shook his head. "Do not be arrogant, what you truly care about is your own safety. But I do not wish to criticize you, because I am not really that much more respectable than you."

With his body leaning forward, his sharp gaze swept past every single noble. "The problem is not about the title of the invitation. The problem is actually about whether His Majesty would obtain the public's popular opinion and threaten his subordinates and the suzerains through this National Conference. This is about the safety of us all, not just the northern nobles!"

The crowd once again burst into an uproar! Some people were even yelling, "Get lost, selfish nobles!"

However, in the midst of the chaos, Count Dagestan still waved at the suzerains. With his ferocious expression, he yelled at the top of his lungs, "Do not forget the Desert War! Do not forget how you were forced to enlist the people in your territories just to take revenge on behalf of the royal family!"

Only at this moment did Kessel the Fifth furrow his brows. Thales had to admit that the speech was very convincing. Thales also began to ponder about the motives for the current National Conference.

Count Talon put up both hands, his brows deeply furrowed together. "We can discuss the order in the future, but that issue is extremely urgent! We have to come up with

the final decision in dealing with that matter today!"

"Decision? What decision?" Count Sorel punched the stone seat, his eyes widened. "Under the watchful eyes of the public! Under such broad daylight! Before all these people, not to mention before our enemies, we cannot even mention what the matter is about! How do we even discuss it?"

"Simple," Black Lion Bozdorf smiled as he said, "Everyone already knows about the matter, but what price are you willing to pay in order to resolve it?"

Right at this very moment, a sharp laughter could be heard from the six dukes, "Hahaha, that matter? I say, why still cover it up when you have been saying it for such a long while? What are you afraid of? Eckstedt? Are you afraid of the King? Or us dukes? Or afraid of the people both in the hall and out on the plaza below?"

Everyone's expressions changed and looked towards the haggard Cyril Fakenhaz.

The Guardian Duke of the Western Desert, whose symbol was the Four-Eyed Skull, gave out a terrifying smile.

"Let us just address it directly! Eckstedt's Diplomat Group, alongside their prince, were murdered in Constellation!"

Everyone was shocked!

Even if the nineteen noble families had known about the incident through the general edict, it was still an undisclosed secret!

How dare he... how dare he?

Duke Cullen furrowed his brows. Duke Arunde slapped against his thigh, sighed and shook his head. Zayen, on the other hand, pressed his lips together tightly as he remained silent.

"Sir Fakenhaz!" Kohen's cousin, Derek Kroma, the Count of Wing Fort who was located on the western side of the Kingdom with the Western Desert duke, tried to stop him with a ghastly expression. "We do not have to mention this in the National Conference—"

"Be quiet, boy! The adults are talking!" Fakenhaz rudely cut him off, leaving the Count

of Wing Fort—who somewhat knew Fakenhaz—to hold his breath for a second.

The old Count Karabeyan, who was close to the Kroma family, could not help but furrow his brows.

With a sullen face, Cyril Fakenhaz grinded his teeth together and continued to expose the supposedly forbidden secret, "You are all well aware of this. It is only the people who do not know! Those savages will not let go of this opportunity!

"That lousy treaty has restricted them, but they've been rubbing their fists and wiping their palms as they waited for twelve years. Everyone in Constellation, regardless of the king, nobles, or commoners, listen closely!

"Constellation and Eckstedt... War is coming between Western Peninsula's Shield and Blade."

Chapter 60

Real Intentions Revealed at the End

The terror caused a commotion among members of the populace and those from the minor nobility classes as well as those from the intermediate nobility classes. The guards had no choice but to shout loudly.

"Cyril, you are very daring in speech." Val gave Cyril a meaningful glance. "Thanks to you, no one will raise the question of returning to the private and small conference room now."

The counts who were seated on their stone chairs responded with silence.

Duke Fakenhaz's gaze was dark. Even when he laughed, his voice was shrill. "This would have happened sooner or later. I only got rid of the relief and terror on your behalves."

"The banquet's 'unwelcome presence'." Duke Cullen sighed. "Indeed, you deserve this title."

Like most of the counts from the Thirteen Distinguished Families, Zayen's face was gloomy and he did not say anything.

After more than ten seconds, disorderly buzzing sounds from the panic-stricken populace in Star Plaza could be heard from the Hall of Stars. The news of the impending clash between Eckstedt and Constellation was completely out in the open.

Count Sorel stared straight at the king with a hostile glare. "Your Majesty, you have achieved your desired effect in announcing this impending disaster to the citizens of our kingdom. The question is, how do we clear up this mess now?"

Kessel's face was cold as ice and he said nothing. He only gave Sorel a quick glance, the latter was still putting up a stubborn front.

Count Talon stared impolitely at Sorel. "It's easy. Do we fight or negotiate? If we were to fight, we shall return to our respective territories and mobilize our forces."

"We still have the chance to negotiate. We have allies. We can invite them to resolve the dispute, just like twelve years ago." Zayen slowly raised his head and looked at the other suzerains. "War might not break out if we make the necessary sacrifices..."

Fakenhaz cut the young duke off and spoke sarcastically, "The one who died in their diplomat group was a prince. He was King Nuven's only son and the only heir of the Walton family. Make sacrifices? True, we probably just have to cut off a piece of land from the north and give it to Eckstedt. That will do."

Count Zemunto said coldly, "The Northern Territory will not hand over a single inch of land. Our family has guarded that land for generations."

"But it is true that the prince died within your territory, is it not?" Count Dagestan laughed out loud. "This is your responsibility. Of course, you have to pay the price."

Count Friess raised his head, and there was a fierce glare in his eyes. "If you are not joking, Dagestan, then we can have a duel on the Stage of Eradication right now."

"Alright, then. Why don't we hand them twenty percent of the Eternal Oil supply in Eastern Sea?" Duke Fakenhaz pretended to be deep in thought. He first looked at Duke Cullen and then Zayen, flashing a nonchalant smile. "How about the Crystal Drop Ore in the south?"

"Even jokes must have a limit, Cyril," Duke Cullen replied in a rare show of sternness.

Zayen flashed a friendly smile at him and shook his head slightly. At that moment, Kessel the Fifth knocked his scepter lightly on the floor. All the nobles went silent and looked towards him.

Under the king's gaze, Gilbert nodded and took a step forward. He spoke with a frown, "According to sources of the Kingdom's Secret Intelligence Department, Dragon Clouds City already learned of their prince's demise in Constellation yesterday. The Archduke of Black Sand acted even faster than their king. He began recruiting troops and mobilizing his army two days ago. The two other Archdukes in the southern part of Eckstedt were two days slower than him, but there is not much difference."

The hall was immediately in an uproar!

"Silence!" Gilbert said, loud and stern.

Amid the complicated emotions of the people in the hall, the supreme king spoke in a low and sincere voice, "If war breaks out between the two kingdoms, the royal family and the Talon Family will give our all in assisting the Northern Territory."

Count Talon nodded firmly.

The king looked towards the Duke of the Northern Territory with a flat expression. "Val, how many troops and provisions can you supply?"

Val Arunde responded sternly, "How many troops? Are you joking? I have already called together all my vassals. We have fifteen thousand infantrymen, a thousand archers, five hundred heavy cavalier units and even a small amount of Mystic Guns! They will reinforce the Broken Dragon Fortress in the shortest time and receive orders from the commander, Lady Sonia Sasere.

"That is our territory! And if war breaks out, even the women and children will carry weapons! As for provisions, it depends on how much land we are able to defend."

The two counts, Zemunto and Friess, nodded firmly and added on, "The three thousand and five hundred people in Overwatch City shall pledge their lives and battle!"

"Lonely Old Tower has only two thousand infantrymen. However, we will fight until the end, even if there is only one soldier left."

"We can handle the pressure from the three Archdukes of Eckstedt. However, if it comes down to the entirety of Eckstedt..." The Duke of Northern Territory straightened his back and surveyed every single noble with a piercing gaze. "We need the strength of all of Constellation."

Kohen, who stood behind old Count Karabeyan, scratched his head. In a low voice, he asked in bewilderment, "Isn't this National Conference directed at the entire kingdom? Why are they announcing the disposition of their troops like that?"

Old Count Karabeyan closed his eyes softly and sighed lightly, then lowered his voice and told his son with a tired expression, "Can't you see it? The nobles from the north are acting in front of Eckstedt.

"Do you believe that Duke Arunde can gather ten thousand men? Constellation never recovered from the Bloody Year. I suspect that those suzerains have at most one third

of the troops they just declared."

Kohen was immediately stunned.

He looked towards the emblem of the two silver cross-shaped stars on the ceiling of the hall. 'As descendants of the Empire and the Western Peninsula's Shield, has Constellation weakened to this extent?'

Kessel the Fifth nodded lightly and turned towards the scary-looking Cyril. "How about the suzerains of the Western Desert?"

Cyril Fakenhaz tilted his head backwards and shut his eyes. "The Ruins can only dispatch a thousand infantrymen. Lately, the Barren Bone Tribe has been creating commotion again. As for Mystic Guns, we don't even have enough for ourselves."

The young Count Derek Kroma muttered, "Wing Fort is not known for its military force, but we can dispatch a hundred of the best Raven Whistle Light Cavaliers."

Bozdorf furrowed his brows hard. "Brave Souls Fort has been in a state of unrest lately. An orc was made leader. He is now gathering together the forces of power from various families. Black Lion Family can only dispatch two hundred men."

The stinginess of the Western Desert nobles caused the nobles present to begin whispering among themselves.

Kohen furrowed his brows. He once served at the Western Desert's frontline during the Battle of Elimination[1] which came after the Desert War. Based on what he knew, the Western Desert army force was definitely not that weak.

Val looked coldly at Fakenhaz. "You were pretty enthusiastic when revealing the secret just now. When it came to the drafting of troops... hmph."

Another surge of cheers rang from Star Plaza into the Hall of Stars. This time, it was an excited cheer and there were many passionate voices inside.

Count Talon touched his five-pointed star breastpin and sighed. "Haih. I bet that the guards have only passed down the messages regarding the Northern Territory's army force, but not the Western Desert's."

Kessel the Fifth maintained his composure. He turned and asked Cullen, "How about

the Sun Sword and Shield Family, and the entire Eastern Sea?"

The plump duke said with a smile, "Your Majesty, most people on the Eastern Sea earn their living from the sea. We do not have enough troops. However, we can contribute on monetary terms and enlist mercenaries. If an all-out war breaks out, as long as it is not winter and the sea is not frozen, our naval fleet can even attack Eckstedt's Eastern shore."

Beside the Duke of Eastern Sea, Count Noah Javea and Count Clark Almond looked at each other and nodded.

Duke Fakenhaz spoke in a shrill voice, "Thank you for reminding us that it happens to be December now. Winter is here."

Kessel the Fifth tapped his stone chair and asked in a profound manner, "So there are no men, only money? I remember that during the Desert War, you told me that you have no money, but can contribute men. And that it was still a little far to transport the troops from the Eastern Sea to the Western Desert?"

"Five years ago, all the people did not know how to go out and earn money. That is why there was no money, but plenty of men. But now, all the people are out earning money. That is why there are no men, but plenty of money," Duke Cullen answered with a smile and without batting an eyelid.

The king snorted softly, and the Duke of the Northern Territory's expression turned extremely unpleasant.

King Kessel turned his head towards the nobles from the south.

Before the king could ask, Zayen answered with a worried tone, "There are no usable cavaliers in the entire South Coast Hill. The Covendier Family can gather two thousand infantrymen from Jade City's borders. There are also some Mystic Guns. However, they might suffer due to the climate if they were to battle for an extended period of time in the north. My vassals will also definitely be unhappy. I cannot guarantee the quality of the troops."

The old Count Karabeyan also spoke at the appropriate time with a solemn expression, "It is the same for Walla Hill. Even if the vassals are included, I am not confident that I will be able to gather even three hundred soldiers."

Kohen, who was behind the count, lowered his head and sighed softly.

He still remembered that when his two sisters went to visit their friends, his father immediately dispatched five hundred troops to escort them.

Count Lascia was even more direct. "The soldiers from the moors are not suited to battle in the north at all."

Kessel the Fifth did not say anything else. He only exhaled lightly. "The Guardian Dukes of the Land of Cliffs and Blade Edge Hill have not arrived yet. However, I assume that their stance, along with that of the other four families, would be the same."

As nobles from the Land of Cliffs Region, Count Sorel and Count Dagestan turned their heads and did not say anything.

In contrast, the heads of trades and tradesmen who were observing the conference began whispering among themselves. More than anything, they were worried about the impending war.

"Is this how all of you would repay Constellation?"

The Duke of the Northern Territory looked extremely furious. He stood up abruptly and pointed at the two cross-shaped stars above him, then spoke furiously, "This is the kingdom you swore your loyalty to and is also the greatest kingdom in human history! Even if the Northern Territory is not your territory, the Double Cross-Shaped Stars Flag waves on it! Just like your territories!"

Count Dagestan said coldly, "Your Grace, five years ago, I fought for Constellation, too. In the end, I lost my eldest son forever in the Western Desert. I guess you, who do not have a son, will not be able to understand this..."

"Bullshit!" Val opened his eyes wide in fury and turned his head abruptly. "My only daughter, the heir of White Eagle, is now at Broken Dragon Fortress at the border between the two kingdoms. She is under the command of Lady Sonia Sasere, the Fortress Flower! Her life and death depends on the outcome of the battle between the Great Dragon and Constellation!"

Having heard this, Kohen could not help but lower his head. He sighed and looked towards Raphael, who stood behind the Black Prophet.

"Perhaps we don't have to wage war. We can choose to negotiate. Even if Eckstedt dispatches their army, it would be for the sake of gaining something." Duke Cullen shook his head and sighed.

"And then force the Northern Territory to submissively hand over its land?" Like a hunting falcon, Val glared at every single person who replied.

At this moment, Zayen raised his head with a firm gaze and looked at the king. "Now that we know the chips in our hands and the size of our troops, the choice of whether to battle or to negotiate depends on Your Majesty's will."

Everyone's gazes immediately turned towards Kessel.

Val's gaze was anxious and stern. There was a smile in Cullen's eyes, though it had a complicated look within it as well. Cyril's gaze was a ruminating one, and Zayen's gaze was calm.

"So, this is my kingdom?" Kessel slowly raised his head. His gaze cut into every single suzerain like a knife. "The king only has his regular troops and direct vassals in the face of the entire army force of another kingdom?"

"Or I will have to represent Constellation and disgracefully agree to all their possible terms and conditions?"

Cyril Fakenhaz grinned and said, "Hehe, there cannot be a battle without sufficient firepower. However, the royal family's dignity cannot be something that can be placed on the negotiating table either..."

Kessel the Fifth sighed, "Indeed, it is just as what Mane et Nox says, 'All kings are lonely people'."

At that moment, a resounding voice angrily erupted with every single syllable practically roared from the main door of the Hall of Stars!

"Your Majesty, please take back those words! As long as we are around, you will never be lonely! As nobles of Constellation, and descendants of the Empire, how can we back off?"

Amid the commotion in the hall, a noble who seemed to be in the prime of his life entered. His left eye was covered in horrifying scars, and he wore a yellow-and-black

cape with an image of deer antlers on it. He walked towards the six stone chairs coolly and arrogantly.

Part of the nobles and members of the populace in the hall started clapping enthusiastically. As for the rest, some sneered with contempt, and the others shook their heads and sighed.

Duke Cullen flashed a resigned smile, while Val and Zayen looked grim.

"Nanchester's One-Eyed Dragon," Cyril Fakenhaz laughed loudly and said, "I thought you would only arrive at night!"

The mayor of Steep Forest City and the Guardian Duke of the Land of Cliffs spoke with a fierce expression.

"Compared to this... look at what all of you have done?"

He kissed Kessel's ring but did not sit down on his stone chair. Instead, he turned towards Val. "Sir Arunde, do not worry! Steep Forest City shall dispatch all its troops and head north towards Broken Dragon Fortress!"

However, under Val's surprised and complicated gaze, he immediately switched the topic and turned towards Kessel the Fifth.

"In the face of this war that will affect the whole nation, as long as you can set your followers' minds at ease, I cannot think of any reason to back down!"

Almost all the nobles in the hall furrowed their brows.

'Set his followers' minds at ease?'

Kessel the Fifth slowly said, "Koshder, what do you mean?"

"Your Majesty, do you still not understand?" Koshder asked sternly, "There is an impending all-out war, but the nobles are terrified and confused. They are making all sorts of excuses! Under this situation, to endure the torment of deciding whether to battle or to negotiate all alone, as our king...

"This is unfair to you! But why do you think this is happening?"

Koshder shut his single eye tightly and took a deep breath. He then firmly said, "Iron Fist King, Your Majesty! The suzerains and the nobles do not dare to follow you! All of Constellation is laden with fear... that tragedy was over twelve years ago, and the late king's remains are already buried! However, we still do not know what you are thinking! We do not know what sort of king we are following!"

All the nobles went completely silent in an instant. Gilbert and Jines furrowed their brows at the same time.

Kessel tightened his grip on his scepter slightly and stared at Koshder with a complicated expression. However, Koshder continued speaking without backing down, "We are all afraid of you. Nobody knows what a solitary king who acts without hesitation—who is the only person left in the Jadestar Family—would do! Moreover, this is a war we are talking about!"

Koshder turned, the sharp gaze of his single eye swept past every single suzerain. He enunciated every single one of his words clearly, "Your Majesty! The blood is gone, but Constellation still remains. Why do you have to endure the suspicion and envy of nobles, even when it comes to such an obvious choice of whether to go to war?"

Kessel the Fifth's gaze became increasingly dark and cold. On the other hand, the four dukes simultaneously avoided his gaze.

Koshder pointed at the two cross-shaped stars on the ceiling and spoke loudly, "Your Majesty, for the benefit of Constellation and for the dignity of the Jadestar Royal Family, we cannot be hesitant when it comes to this crisis! That is why, Your Majesty, please share the burden of Constellation with us! To battle or to negotiate. Let all of us bear the price of this decision together!"

"If Constellation is to have a bright future and a stable society, and if the royal family does not cease to exist... I believe that no one will back down in the face of such an important war for the kingdom!"

At that moment, many people have already sensed something. Morat Hansen lowered his head, soundlessly curling up his lips.

'It's coming. That was fast.' Zayen squeezed his nose bridge and shut his eyes. 'It's coming. Hopefully it goes well.'

Cullen smiled as he watched Koshder act. 'It's coming... Interesting.'

Val looked at the Guardian Duke of the Land of Cliffs in a daze and clenched his teeth. 'Is this their aim? Are both Kel and I their prey?'

The counts were whispering to each other on their stone chairs. Some of them were plagued with worry and the others nodded profusely. Only the members of the populace who were observing the meeting whispered among themselves in confusion.

However, everything in the Hall of Stars was still ongoing.

"Your Majesty, you will soon be forty-eight years old—on the eve of Constellation's battle with the Dragon!"

Under the watchful eyes of the crowd, Koshder threw off his cape and, with a stern expression, he waved his arm towards the nobles in the hall.

"Please choose an heir to the kingdom among us nobles! Please use your action to tell the nobles that you still care about this kingdom's stability and continuity, that you still trust these suzerains, who are your right hands!

"Then, we will battle for Constellation's dignity and Jadestar's honor! Without complaints! Without backing down!"

Silence. Absolute silence. A suffocating silence.

No one dared to be the first one to say something after hearing these words.

That was until a shrill and unbridled laughter broke the silence. "Hahaha..."

Under everyone's bewildered gaze, Duke Fakenhaz opened his mouth and laughed crazily and joyfully. His messy teeth looked especially scary. "What did the Far Easterners say again? Real intentions will be revealed at the end?

"Your Majesty, do you want to fight this war with dignity? Exchange it with your throne! Hahahahaha..."

Editor's Note:

[1] Not to be confused with the Battle of Eradication.

Chapter 61

The Journey

Thales watched with indifference as the nobles argued openly while throwing scathing remarks against each other in the dark. He lowered his head in dismay.

He sighed lightly. 'Power, procedures, war, army force, the throne, is this the future I have to face?'

He suddenly felt that this unknown and strange world which had originally piqued his curiosity endlessly was becoming a little boring.

Duke Cullen, who was beside Fakenhaz, stared at him in dissatisfaction. "Cyril, do you have to be this straightforward every time?"

An earth-shattering roar rang from Star Plaza. It was noisy, and the noise was filled with both fury and passion. The sounds could not be heard clearly.

On the other hand, in the Hall of Stars, members of the populace and nobles of the minor nobility class immediately erupted into a flood of protests!

"Shameless suzerain! This is a usurping of the throne!"

"But we need an heir! What if something bad happens to the king at the frontlines..."

"Die, traitor! Jadestar is our king, that was our sacred pledge!"

"This is all for Constellation! We must stand together and meet Eckstedt head-on!"

The dukes quietly exchanged glares while the counts whispered among themselves.

"Silence! Silence!" Gilbert tried his best to maintain order, but it was ineffective.

That was until the Supreme King of Constellation, Kessel the Fifth, spotted a brilliant glint in his eyes.

Grasping the mysterious scepter that shone with starlight, he rose from the throne and yelled furiously with his authoritative voice, "An heir?"

The Hall of Stars immediately went silent. Everyone stared at the king's robust figure.

"What good timing! You just had to do this when Constellation is in trouble, and when all of us need to work together to fight the enemy!"

The king rested his hands on the scepter and watched Koshder Nanchester with a sharp gaze. The One-Eyed Dragon slowly placed his hand in front of his chest and knelt on one knee before the king.

Nanchester spoke steadily and seriously. The sincerity in his words could be felt. "Forgive me, Your Majesty, but this is a test. I believe that the weakened and scattered powers of Constellation can once again come together amid this face-off between the Dragon and Constellation.

"Everyone knows that the first person to speak out in forcing Your Majesty to appoint an heir will face the accusations of the masses. However, this is not so that myself—so that Nanchester—can take the throne."

Koshder raised his head, and the gaze in his one eye was clear. "Your Majesty, you can very well exclude Nanchester from the list of candidates. Everything is for Constellation's sake. Please appoint an heir, or at least set a method for the selection of the heir. That way, Constellation will definitely return to stand at the top of the Western Peninsula, and might even display the glory of the Empire again."

Kessel slowly walked towards him and laughed coldly, "Koshder, sometimes even I cannot tell whether your awe-inspiring righteousness is out of sincerity or not."

The one-eyed duke said calmly, "But if it is beneficial for Constellation, does it matter whether it is sincere or not?"

"I have also imagined this situation before. However, in my imagination, this would have happened during the Higher Parliament Conference. It did not have to be so ugly," Count Dagestan said as he steadily rose and went behind Koshder. Similarly, he knelt on one knee. "But Your Majesty, due to the National Conference you decided to hold, this proper remonstrance became a public conflict. One that appears as though we are publicly forcing you to abdicate your throne."

Count Sorel walked up from the back and knelt on one knee, speaking solemnly, "However, we all have sufficiently legitimate reasons to resurrect this once mighty kingdom, which is right now in a disastrous state."

Gilbert was so angry that his face was distorted in fury. "Just by having a new king? Do you think that by wearing the crown, Constellation will become the Empire?"

Count Bozdorf walked forward gloomily and knelt down steadily. "It is not that simple. Instead, we want to make the superior king who acts at his own will part of us. To think as we do and to act as we do. The ruler and the nobles were once united, and had been segregated due to the difference in power... Now, we will become one again."

Zayen lowered his head and spoke sadly, "The Covendier Family has followed the Jadestar Family since the Battle of Eradication. This vow will always stand. However, I think that Tormond the First would also want to safeguard the safety and future of Constellation—he would understand."

The Duke of Tricolor Iris Flowers rose with resolution and joined the kneeling group.

Fakenhaz's inappropriate laughter rang at an inappropriate time again. "Do you mean that we should adopt a king selection system? Hah, indeed, it will let all of you 'share the burden of Constellation'! Just like Eckstedt, is it not?"

"Better than Eckstedt. We have a thousand-year foundation from the Empire." Count Lascia from South Coast Hill looked at Duke Zayen with a complicated expression. He then went forward and knelt.

Kohen stared in disbelief as his father, the old Count Karabeyan, quietly knelt along with Count Lascia.

Kessel coldly looked down at these dukes and counts as one by one, they knelt down on one knee.

Duke Cullen sighed at that moment. "This is not the Jadestar Royal Family's fault. It is the fault of that crown, that throne, and that scepter. Since the royal blood is going extinct, for Constellation's sake, it might not be a bad thing if you appoint an heir."

After Duke Cullen spoke, the two counts from the Eastern Sea, Javea and Almond, quietly went forward and knelt down.

One of the members of the king's partisan, Count Godwin, spoke through clenched teeth, "It is obviously a shameful act to force the king to abdicate his throne. How do you even make this sound so justified and righteous?"

"Can you not see it?" Derek Kroma steadily left his seat and knelt down. "This is a representation of the general trend in the country."

Below Renaissance Palace, the noises from the crowd became louder and louder.

Bang!

Val hit the handle of his stone chair with his fist. His gaze was cold. Clenching his fists tightly and lowering his head, he said, "Sometimes, I am really disgusted by all of you. An unbelievably coincidental war, an unbelievably coincidental remonstrations, and the Northern Territory which is being sacrificed..."

Kessel the Fifth looked straight at him with a unique gaze that was difficult to comprehend. Under the king's indecipherable gaze, the Duke of the Northern Territory shut his eyes tightly and inhaled.

His brows moved about, shifting as if they were a reflection of how great his emotions were in conflict with each other.

In the end, as if having made a decision, he opened his eyes and looked at Kessel. However, Val did not look at the king's eyes. The heroic Duke of the Northern Territory spoke with desolation and disappointment, "But if this can lead to the stability and safety of the Northern Territory and Constellation... Kel, maybe you should consider it."

The two counts who were his subordinates from the Northern Territory lowered their heads in silence.

Kessel's gaze dimmed. He turned and did not look at his good childhood friend anymore.

Looking at how hesitant and guilty Val seemed, Duke Cyril Fakenhaz once again emitted a shrill laughter. "Your Majesty, it seems like you only have two choices left—to immediately appoint an heir, or to set a king selection system."

Kessel the Fifth stood above all his vassals without any facial expression. The only

thing he grasped tightly in his hand was his scepter. Thales suddenly felt that his father looked very lonely.

'If he didn't find me, how would the situation today be?'

Watching everything by the side, Thales suddenly felt dizzy.

'It's coming again.'

A fragment of a past memory flashed before his eyes.

Wu Qiren was sitting in an extremely small classroom, speaking to a lecturer in front of him and two other students.

"Poggi inherited Weber's Deutsche Academic tradition. With his research topic revolving around power, he investigated the formation of feudal countries..."

'No! Not now!'

Thales pressed his palms against his temples hard and suppressed the flashback.

When Thales' attention returned to the Hall of Stars, Kessel the Fifth's majestic voice rang beside his ears, "It seems that if I do not appoint an heir, we will not even be able to go to war... Very well. Then, I shall appoint an heir."

Zayen's brows furrowed slightly. He felt increasingly unsettled.

Kessel the Fifth slowly sat down without even looking at the nobles on the floor. Those words that Thales had been waiting all this while finally resonated in the air. "Let him meet everyone, Gilbert."

'It's time.' Thales' mind went blank. He forced himself to gulp and watched as Gilbert waved his hand.

Within the dark room, a secret door suddenly opened in front of Thales. It contained a long flight of stairs leading to an unknown location. The crowd in the Hall of Stars began discussing among themselves.

The dukes and the counts maintained their composure. However, they could see the uncertainty in each other's gazes.

Thales rearranged his bow tie, then addressed himself with the name that belonged to him in this world. 'Thales, it's time.'

Thales resolutely stepped on the stairs. 'Just take it as another game.'

One step.

Another step.

On the floor, Count Dagestan raised his head and stared straight at Kessel. "I apologize for not understanding what you mean, Your Majesty... Could it be that the heir that you chose is not among the nobles in this hall?"

The supreme king only stared at him coldly without saying anything.

In the narrow passageway, Thales pressed his hands against his forehead hard. The flashback returned, but he clenched his teeth and firmly walked forwards.

When he opened his eyes, he saw the Hall of Stars, but when he closed his eyes, he saw the other version of himself living within the fragments of those memories.

"The bond between the feudal king and his vassals is strongly emotional and personal in nature... Due to the fight for power, the bond slowly deteriorates. There is a breakdown in order, and the rapport becomes unstable. Violence and unrest breaks out periodically... Then the unified feudal system finally falls apart...

"However, the rise of feudalism is still a praiseworthy effort in stabilizing public rule... Poggi also believed that in this process, the legitimacy of power, the boundary of the king's rule, the country's responsibilities and traditions, and even the importance of law became a part of history, and received recognition. This is the most valuable legacy left behind by feudalism to the countries that came afterwards...

"But we still have to ask. What is lacking in Poggi's observation and analysis?"

'What is lacking?'

"Your Majesty, have you chosen your heir?" The One-Eyed Dragon, Koshder Nanchester, raised his single eye and looked around him with a profound gaze. "But it seems that the Tabark Family and the two Distinguished Families from the southwest have not arrived yet."

The supreme king still did not pay him any attention. Thales reached a side door and could already see the members of the populace gathered outside the Hall of Stars.

'No, it's not a side door.'

He realized that the door in front of him led towards the center of the hall—where the twenty stone chairs were.

'It's the main door.'

The guards had a solemn expression on their faces. However, some could not help but look at him and the emblem on his clothes.

The moment they saw it clearly, the breathing quickened for many of them. Some even lost their composure and leaned forward to take a look.

However, a guard who appeared to be the leader sternly reprimanded them to return to their positions. He then respectfully saluted Thales and cleared a path for him to enter the hall, but when Thales was about to start walking—

"Go. You will be better than him."

Thales raised his head abruptly. The guard had already turned and left.

Only the back of a figure clad in armor and a helmet could be seen.

'Yodel.' Thales clenched his fist tightly. 'Is it you?'

Similarly, some of the members of the populace gathered outside the hall had already noticed the boy standing outside the door. They started whispering among themselves while signaling to each other.

The flashback faded away like a receding tide. The boy felt as though there was a newfound surge of energy in his body that made him more alert.

Thales took three deep breaths. 'This is just another game... This is just another thesis defense.'

Thales pushed aside all his emotions and cleared all the expressions on his face. He then stepped onto the astral blue, patterned carpet.

He stepped into his future.

He walked onwards, passing by members of the populace who gathered at the outermost layer of the crowd.

A squire from the outskirts dressed in slightly old-fashioned clothing jabbed his friend beside him—who ran errands between the city and the countryside.

"Who is that?"

"Even a child can enter the Hall of Stars now?"

"Maybe he's a noble."

"But he's so young."

"Eh, can you see it? That child is dressed so beautifully."

"Almost as beautiful as the young lady from the baron's family."

Thales did not avert his gaze. He walked on, passing traders, artisans, farmers and the head of trades who occupied the steps.

A plump carriage trader was a little surprised. He pulled the arms of two other people who were in the same trade as him.

"Look at that child!"

"Is he a noble who came late?"

"With that attire, he is definitely more than a noble of the minor nobility class!"

"Do you recognize the emblem on his clothing?"

"It seems a little familiar. I once fetched some customers, whose scrolls they held had that emblem."

"Why is he coming at this time?"

Thales did not stop walking. He continued onwards, then walked past the seats

occupied by honorary militants and administrative officers.

A judge from a little village nearby saw him. He furrowed his brows and lowered his head, whispering softly at the authorized signatory from another town hall.

"Look at that family emblem."

"That's... my God!"

"How is this possible?"

"I also think that it's impossible. Are you sure you didn't get it wrong?"

"I have handled almost a hundred warrants from the king! How can I get it wrong?!"

Thales ignored them completely and continued onwards, walking past nobles of minor nobility classes such as lords and barons sitting on stone stools.

The eyes of a baron smoking from a pipe shone with a bright light. He almost bit on the pipe in his mouth. He leaned his body forward and tapped his good friend's shoulder.

"That cannot be the... Nine-Pointed Star?"

"What? This..."

"Are you thinking the same thing I am?"

"More or less."

"Then, now..."

"Yes, as expected of the Iron Hand King."

Thales paid them no attention. He passed by the stone chairs of viscounts, counts, and other nobles of the intermediate nobility class.

An honorary count opened his mouth in disbelief.

He did not have to notify the others as many of the nobles had seen Thales.

"Is that..."

"Heavens above... this, how are they going to put an end to this?"

"It cannot be. All these years, there was no news at all..."

"Perhaps he is an illegitimate son who was wandering about out there..."

"Then the suzerains..."

"Haih, the waters in this matter run too deep..."

"Let us just wait and see."

The discussion, noise and chatter among the crowds became increasingly louder. In the end, it became a loud commotion.

All the people stood up and leaned forward, eagerly watching the mysterious boy wearing a gold-and-silver nine-pointed star.

Behind the stone chair at the center, Kohen turned his head curiously to look at the source of the commotion.

A boy in noble attire who wore a nine-pointed star breastpin walked forward with a solemn expression.

Seeing the nine-pointed star, the stunned Kohen did not move.

"That boy... why does he have the Jade... Jadestar Family emblem?"

Without batting an eyelid, Thales stepped between the thirteen stone chairs.

Gilbert winked at him.

The three dukes who were seated saw the approaching boy clearly. They could no longer maintain their composure.

Val stared at the boy in shock and clenched his fists tightly, "This... are you joking?"

Cullen furrowed his brows deeply and leaned his plump body forward. "That boy... his

emblem..."

On the other hand, Cyril ground his horrifying teeth and his brows twitched. He uttered a few words, "Ah, ah... this is indeed... beyond my expectations."

The supreme king slowly raised his head. His gaze was cold but carried the hint of a smile as well.

He chuckled as he said, "Everyone, meet Thales."

The suzerains who were kneeling on the floor turned their heads.

The moment Zayen Covendier, the Guardian Duke of South Coast, saw the boy's face clearly, his pupils immediately contracted.

'It's him... It's him? It's him!'

Kessel gently stroked his scepter once more, and spoke with dignified authority, "He is my son. The only blood descendant of the Jadestar Royal Family."

Thales extended his right hand forward and placed his left hand on his back. He bowed deeply to the king.

He then turned towards all the suzerains.

"Good day, sirs," Thales heard himself say.

That was the first time he spoke to the honorable suzerains of Constellation, who had a large number of troops in their hands... and ruled the kingdom.

Chapter 62

You Owe Me a Word of Thanks

The suppressed commotion in the Hall of Stars officially became a hall-wide uproar.

Everybody, including members of the populace, officials, and nobles of various classes, eagerly drew themselves forward. They all wanted to have a look at the first Jadestar offspring to appear in twelve years.

Under Gilbert's orders, group after group of well-armed guards rapidly entered the scene and formed human barricades. Holding anti-force shields and riot control sticks borrowed from the police station, they forcibly warded off the crowd and maintained order.

"Move back, or else you will be punished for disrespect towards the royal family!" the guards screamed at the top of their lungs.

However, even these guards sometimes turned their heads back to look at that boy with the special identity but was only six or seven years old.

Thales stood in the hall unperturbed. Facing the gazes of people from the entire hall, he was calm and composed.

'This is what I have no choice but to face.'

He felt a little spiritless, which was why he felt extremely calm even though he had to endure an endless number of gazes trained on his person.

Especially the gazes of those dukes and counts who numbered, altogether, more than ten people. There was bewilderment, shock, fury, indignation, contemplation, and ambiguity in their gazes. After that, their gazes simultaneously became one of scrutiny and caution, piercing into him like sharp knives.

There was also Zayen Covendier's complicated gaze. Zayen could only feel the blood in his entire body flow upwards to his brain.

Trembling slightly, he slowly stood up and stared at Thales in disbelief. 'It's that boy... How can this be?

'The supposed illegitimate child of Lord Mahn... Him?

'The greater irony is the fact that I just saved his life from the hands of assassins yesterday.

'If I had insisted yesterday... or simply stayed out of it and let him die in the hands of the assassins... '

He clenched his fists tightly and gritted his teeth.

'No, we have not lost yet. There is still a chance!'

However, a greater, noisier, and more deafening cheer rang from Star Plaza. The news about the Jadestar descendant had finally been announced to the entire kingdom.

Gilbert coldly said, "Go back to your seats, gentlemen. I believe that His Majesty will humbly accept your remonstrations and take your suggestions to appoint an heir."

"Why does this boy have the nine-pointed star...? It has been twelve years... Your Majesty..." Count Sorel could not hide his shocked expression at all. He returned to his stone chair in a daze.

"We have never heard about Queen Keya having a third child... Who exactly is this unknown child...?" Count Dagestan muttered as he sat back down on his stone chair. He furrowed his brows in deep contemplation.

"Your Majesty, we still need an explanation!" Duke Koshder, the One-Eyed Dragon from Nanchester Family lowered his head. His expression could not be seen clearly in the shadows, but he kept his fists clenched tightly.

He suddenly raised his head and glared furiously and fixedly at Kessel the Fifth with his single eye. "To have a boy wearing the Nine-Pointed Star family emblem appear at this time... are you toying with us?"

Kessel the Fifth did not even glance at him. He stared in another direction.

Val furrowed his brows deeply and sighed softly. He spoke forlornly, "Kel, I understand.

So, this was your aim. Just like these disgusting people, you had a plan. You did not hold this National Conference for the purpose of reacting to Eckstedt at all... but for this child."

The Duke of the Northern Territory leaned back and looked at the expressionless Thales. He then looked at the silent king and continued, "Do all of you think I am a fool? Hah, after all this, apart from the Northern Territory itself, nobody cares about Eckstedt and the war." He laughed mockingly. "Look, this is the glory of Constellation, the afterglow of the Empire."

Kessel the Fifth ignored him. The other suzerains also avoided his gaze.

The plump Duke Cullen furrowed his brows, a sight that was rarely seen. He contemplated earnestly in solemnity without saying anything.

"It is not a surprise. We are talking about the Jadestar Royal Family and the nineteen noble families here." Duke Fakenhaz laughed dryly. Not caring that the people he reprimanded included himself, he mocked, "The pillars of Constellation!"

Having calmed down, Zayen Covendier exchanged a look with Koshder. They tried to communicate with Duke Cullen, who was sitting in another stone chair. However, the latter had his head lowered in thought, as though nothing in the outside world mattered to him.

'Damned old man.' The young Duke of the South Coast and the one-eyed Duke of the Land of Cliffs mentally scolded at the same time. 'He is the pioneer of "New Star" and also the first person to agree to the plan, but he is always the first one to retreat when accidents happen.'

Watching the counts and dukes as they returned to their seats, Gilbert responded coldly, "Everyone, you have heard what His Majesty has said. His Majesty will acknowledge this boy as his kin in today's National Conference." The middle-aged noble took a step forward and tried his best to suppress his excitement. "The Jadestar royal bloodline will hence continue..."

"Wait!" The Duke of the Land of Cliffs, Koshder the One-Eyed Dragon, seemed to have just snapped out of the shock that made him lose his composure. He cut Gilbert off in a loud voice, "We all know that two of His Majesty's children have, unfortunately, passed away twelve years ago, but we do not yet know what exactly this boy's origin

is!"

'Perhaps the effect would be minimal. However, this has to be stopped no matter what, or else, after planning for so long, they... '

Thales sighed and looked towards Koshder.

'Are they those people Gilbert spoke about? Those who hope to rely on a sudden crisis to change the situation in the kingdom and, hence, obtain power and benefits?'

He glanced at Koshder, Zayen, and the counts. Thales scrutinized them and shook his head slightly. 'This conference is practically like a farce in the market, but it determines the war and peace, and also the future of countless people in the kingdom.'

"Who gave you the power to interrogate His Majesty about his son's identity in front of him during the National Conference?" Count Godwin, who was part of the king's partisan, demanded loudly in dissatisfaction.

Having met Duke Zayen's gaze, Count Lascia slowly said, "This is about the person who will inherit the throne, and the future of Constellation. Every noble who had their title conferred by the king has the right to ask. How can we treat this as child's play?"

Fakenhaz clapped and let out a sinister and shrill laugh. "Great. Just now, the Jadestar Royal Family was still an historical antique about to be swept into the garbage heap. Now, everyone is concerned about the future of the kingdom."

Koshder and Zayen cast a dissatisfied glance at Fakenhaz at the same time.

Val placed his hand on his forehead and spoke while suppressing his fury, "Let this damn farce end soon. No matter what the result is, the Northern Territory is still facing the threat of war.

"Although I know that all of you do not care, and even this crisis is just... Whatever it is, just end it soon." By the end of his sentence, the Duke of the Northern Territory whose gaze was full of fury, shook his head slightly. He said mockingly, "Whether it is the king, or the suzerains... the Northern Territory should never have relied on any of you."

The suzerains looked at each other and was silent for a moment.

The noise in Star Plaza again became louder and resonated in the Hall of Stars. However, the reason is unknown this time.

Kessel lightly tapped his scepter on the floor, garnering everyone's attention. The Iron Hand King's expression was calm and nonchalant.

"Thales, let everyone take a look at who you are." The king's tone was flat. However, his words made everyone's expression change all of a sudden. "Sooner or later, they will kneel before you and pledge their loyalty to you. They will become your support, and the kingdom's pillars."

A few of the counts turned their heads without batting an eyelid, completely forgoing their intention to speak out.

'True. If this boy really becomes the Supreme King of Constellation in the future... '

Without batting an eye, Zayen clasped his hands together and rapidly assessed the situation. 'If the Higher Parliament formed by the nineteen nobles does not acknowledge this child's status... That way... Even if it would damage our public trust... this damn National conference... '

Footsteps rang.

Everyone sitting on the stone chairs turned their heads and watched as the boy went beside King Kessel.

That seemingly thin, weak, and pitiful boy who had to endure the gazes of everyone in the hall. He maintained a calm expression, and even looked a little preoccupied.

He sighed.

"I am Thales." Amid the noise, the neatly dressed boy spoke softly.

The people in the hall quickly went silent so that they could hear him clearly.

This was also a skill he learned from his past life while giving speeches. When speaking in a noisy occasion, the key to silencing others was not by speaking even louder than them; it was to leave them with no choice but to shut up so they can hear him clearly.

"I am a descendant of the Jadestar bloodline. My father is this kingdom's supreme king, King Kessel Jadestar. My grandfather is this kingdom's late king, the King of Eternal Rule, King Aydi Jadestar."

His gaze swept across all the suzerains in front of him. He saw the Duke of the Northern Territory, who sat alone at the side with a dreary expression. The duke's head was lowered and he did not speak—Val Arunde. And the two Counts of the Northern Territory who were sitting behind him.

He then looked at the aggressive One-Eyed Dragon, Nanchester; Zayen, who shook his head slightly while staring at him; Fakenhaz, whose gaze was one of contemplation; and Duke Cullen, who had his head lowered and was smiling.

He looked at the counts, whose expressions differed, but were similarly harboring ulterior motives in their minds.

He even looked at Kessel the Fifth, who had an indifferent expression as he held his scepter.

Thales suddenly awoke to reality. 'My status, the royal family's succession, and even the impending war and Constellation's safety. I'm afraid that those were never in these people's considerations.

'As for the casualties from the wars... '

The dispiritedness and boredom in the boy's heart became greater.

By definition, he should talk about his 'origins' in Mahn Manor according to what he had been told to do, and then let the king and the people from the king's partisan do the rest.

However, Thales felt a little worn out. He did not feel like following the script anymore; he had enough of all this.

The boy's mind began turning. 'The formation of feudal kingdoms... the feudal king and his vassals... strongly emotional and personal... the struggle for power... the bond slowly changes... '

He then slowly opened his eyes and looked at the suzerains. The corner of his lips curled up.

Consequently, everyone saw the boy shut his eyes, then opening them after a second and chuckling softly. Seeing Thales' sardonic grin and how he stopped speaking, Gilbert suddenly felt a chill running up his spine.

'Surely it could not be... '

Although this young gentleman often gave him plenty of scares, Gilbert would still prefer fewer surprises on such an important occasion.

Thales blinked and slowly began speaking, "I can prove that I am part of the Jadestar bloodline. But...

"Forget about that." Thales swept his gaze across the nobles, who were watching him with greedy, predatory eyes. He quietly said, "In any case, even if I am able to prove that I am a descendant of the Jadestar Family, all of you will still have reasons to object to my inclusion into the family, right?"

Koshder spoke coldly, "Child, do you know what you are talking about? If you cannot prove that you are—"

"The Guardian Duke of the Land of Cliffs, Koshder Nanchester," Thales said coldly, "Are your intense objections for the sake of Constellation and the royal family, or for one of you to wear that crown? Is this not something everyone already knows?"

"This is the National Conference, and people from the entire capital city are observing this conference. Who do you think you can deceive with that righteous 'everything I do is for Constellation's sake' air?"

The crowd in the hall immediately burst into uproar.

Gilbert started to feel anxious. This was definitely not in the plan. He was about to speak, when Jines pulled him from behind.

Jines gazed at Thales and spoke in a low voice, "Let him finish. He does not look like he is without a plan."

Koshder, who was sitting on his stone chair, glared fiercely at Thales with his single eye. However, Thales could feel that the Duke of the Land of Cliffs' breathing was quickening.

Thales took huge strides towards Koshder and stared fearlessly into his eye. "You stepped into the Hall of Stars, saying that you want to aid the Northern Territory and unite the kingdom. However, as a prerequisite, you demanded for somebody among your own people to be appointed as heir to the kingdom, or else you will refuse to dispatch troops, and would rather see the Northern Territory fall into enemy hands. Of course, perhaps the decline of the Northern Territory is a good thing for all of you."

Val, whose head was lowered all the while, raised his gaze and looked towards the boy.

Koshder was still staring fixedly at Thales with his single eye, like a mamba snake that was observing its prey before launching an attack.

But Thales was not done speaking. His eyes burned, as if harboring the deepest fury. "However, everyone knows that this is not righteousness but a deal! What you care about is not Constellation, the royal family, nor the people—just yourself! You are not a lone hero who is willing to be subject to disapproval for his kingdom's benefits! All you want is an heir of the kingdom who is to your liking. But you have to mask your desires and interests with righteousness!"

Thales coldly concluded his speech with the knowledge he had learned from the past twenty days. "In the Far East, they call this 'masking your desire with excuses'. Translated, it means this: One-Eyed Dragon, you are a hypocrite. And you disgust me."

There was only coldness left in Koshder's single eye.

The suzerains stared at each other. They could see shock in the others' eyes.

'Although this is an undisclosed story every single intellectual knows, to speak about it in public... is too... '

"Wow." Fakenhaz clapped, as if he craved nothing short of kingdom-wide chaos. He grinned. "At least you are pretty eloquent, child."

Kessel the Fifth ran his hand gently over his scepter. His gaze was profound.

After a few seconds, the crowd burst into an uproar. There were even people shouting loudly at the place where members of the populace and members of the minor nobility classes were seated.

"Are you done speaking?!" Gritting his teeth, Koshder suddenly stood up!

He went right in front of Thales and looked down at him. He spoke intimidatingly, "You damned child, do you think that by spouting nonsense, you can shift..."

Thales also raised his head all of a sudden and coldly cut him off, "Shut up, hypocrite. I am not done speaking yet!"

"The Jadestar bloodline is standing right in front of you. I am the descendant of Tormond the First, and my bloodline is one that you and your ancestors from every single generation had once kneeled and pledged your life and fealty to!" Thales stared at the Duke of the Land of Cliffs without giving any impression of weakness. He spoke without regards for the duke's feelings, "Even if you want to usurp the throne, for the sake of your ancestors, show me some respect."

Koshder widened his one eye. He watched in disbelief as the child in front of him—only six or seven years old—used the Jadestar status that even he himself had not obtained, to insult him. For a moment, he did not even remember to refute.

A loud cheer once again rang from the plaza. Words such as 'Jadestar' and 'prince' could be vaguely heard.

Thales sneered and repeated mercilessly, "Oh no, it seems like the messages were already passed down, hypocritical duke."

Without waiting for Koshder's reaction, he turned abruptly and looked at the suzerains.

Thales spoke steadily and loudly, "All of you have made a deal in private, right? A group of nobles, with determining the next king as their goal, assassinated the Eckstedt Diplomat Group, and incited war. With the fall of the Northern Territory, some people will obtain territories and resources, some will receive promises and gains, and some..." Thales slowly turned and looked towards the young Duke of South Coast. He spoke calmly, one word at a time, "Might get the crown."

"Right? Duke of Tricolor Iris Flowers?"

A lot of people turned their heads at the same time and followed Thales' gaze to look towards Duke Zayen Covendier.

Under the gazes of Thales and the crowd, Zayen felt extremely uncomfortable.

The fact that he unintentionally saved and let go of the boy yesterday, resulting in the boy ruining the plan, also made him very angry. However, his strict upbringing, which had lasted for years, and his training as a noble, allowed him to hide his emotions and maintain the best demeanor.

Zayen flashed a friendly smile and spoke steadily, "Child, making random guesses will not help you get your status confirmed. If you do not plan on explaining your origins and giving us proof, we will have to dispatch an investigation team and spend some time thoroughly investigating your past. Only then—"

Thales suddenly changed the topic and cut him off.

"Yesterday, on my way to Renaissance Palace, I encountered assassins." Thales watched all the seated suzerains as their gazes changed. He spoke calmly, "It was thanks to you, the Guardian Duke of South Coast, Zayen Covendier, helping me in the middle of your journey, that I was able to escape death."

Gilbert and Jines looked at each other. They saw worry in each other's eyes.

Hearing the news about the assassins, the crowds started whispering among themselves again.

Thales nodded at him with a calm expression. "A life was saved, but somebody did not say thank you."

Zayen tried hard to suppress the anger in his heart. "This brat. Is it because you know that I let go of such a large prey, that's why..."

"That's why you deliberately came here to anger me?"

On the surface, Zayen smiled and nodded with considerable grace. "You are welcome. Every noble who passed by had the obligation to extend a helping hand. Moreover, you already thanked me yesterday. However, even though you faced assassination, it cannot prove that you—"

But Thales did not let him continue.

"No, Sir Covendier." Thales coldly raised his head. "You misunderstood me."

Thales walked, step after step, towards Zayen, and slowly spoke, one single word at a

time, according to his steps. That way, the words spoken will bring out the most oppressive and convincing air to others. "I remember the moment when those assassins saw me very clearly. The leader was very shocked. He even shouted 'No'."

Thales went in front of Covendier's stone chair and said slowly, "Gilbert might have been wondering why I faced assassination, although my whereabouts had obviously not been leaked."

Zayen stared in bewilderment at Thales standing before him. 'What on earth does he want to do?'

"As the target of their assassination, I was also very astonished. At that time, almost nobody knew who I was. Even if I were promised that crown, if you—who had relevant interests to the crown—met me, you would not thrust your sword at me without giving me a chance to speak.

"Until just now, when I saw you and your accomplices pushing in unison for an heir to be appointed, I finally understood." Thales lowered his head and sighed deeply. "They were not there to kill me... But to kill someone else."

Zayen's expression finally changed. Watching Zayen's gaze that had turned from skepticism to shock, Thales slowly uttered his remaining words.

"Their target was another person who was also on his way to Renaissance Palace, and was bound to pass by that street. That person was also an important person who was also keeping a low profile and had come on this trip in secret with little protection."

Zayen was so shocked that he could not speak.

Thales' gaze was steady and his words were chilling. Looking at Zayen, who was sitting stunned in his chair, Thales cracked a smile. "Yes, Duke Covendier. Yesterday, I startled the assassins by passing through."

At a corner where no one was paying attention to, Jines lowered her head and shut her eyes tightly.

"Your Grace, it was me. There were more than ten professional assassins who had thorough planning, were well-trained, well-coordinated, and concealed themselves superbly. They had Psionics among them, were equipped with military crossbows, and could accurately assassinate their target who was protected by supreme class elites.

It was me..." Thales narrowed his gray eyes. "...who saved your life from their hands."

He uttered one final sentence, "So, you are the one who owes me a word of thanks, Duke Covendier."

'Checkmate.'

Having understood something, Zayen's face became increasingly pale. He subconsciously rested his back on the stone chair.

The two Counts of South Coast Hill, Karabeyan and Lascia, who were behind him, stared at each other in shock.

Chapter 63

The Bloodline Ceremony

Thales had yet to finish his speech.

"Since you are the assassin's target... who could be the one who wants to take your life?"

Thales' voice pounded on Zayen's heart like a sledgehammer covered in iron thorns. "Your Grace, let us take a moment to recall. What did you plan to do on that day? Who were you going to meet? Who would have knowledge of your whereabouts?"

Zayen exhaled deeply without giving away any emotion on his face, but the scene from that day kept emerging uncontrollably in his mind.

He saw that Gilbert had been among those that were attacked, and to win Gilbert's favor, Zayen had lent a helping hand.

Those assassins, that little boy, and also, the people who knew that he would be there.

Thales sounded cold as he slowly replied word by word, "Was it those people whom you thought were your allies? Those people whom you worked hard with to achieve a better future for Constellation? Those people who once promised you a beautiful future?"

Thales turned his head around as he sighed. "This makes sense. Did they also tell you that among those people who were qualified to succeed the throne, you're the youngest candidate with the best image, has the majority of the people's support, and is the most possible candidate?"

The silent crowd finally started to rise into a clamor. Everyone at the scene had different reactions towards Thales' behavior.

Standing behind Count Karabeyan, the young Officer Kohen stared at the boy in astonishment. 'Is he... really only six or seven years old? When I was seven years old... never mind, just forget it, lest I get upset over the comparison.'

But things did not always turn out how people wished them to be. The old Count Karabeyan turned his head around and glanced at Kohen with a scrutinizing gaze before turning his gaze towards Thales.

Under Kohen's increasingly bewildered expression, the old count's gaze flickered numerous times between Kohen and Thales. Finally, the old count sighed in disappointment after looking at Kohen, before turning his head once again to look at Thales.

He left Kohen looking innocent and clueless, but Kohen then realized what the old count's glances implied, so he lowered his head in misery, 'Old man, do you have to reach that extent! You can't just compare people like that!'

Morat, the Black Prophet, gently exhaled as he stared at Thales with eyes filled with mixed emotions. It seemed that he had previously underestimated him.

The infamous Chief of the Secret Intelligence Department whispered to Raphael who stood behind him, "This child... was indeed out of our expectations... If he were the king you have to serve in the future... The advantage is that you will have less to worry about, but the downside is that you cannot possibly be worry-free."

Raphael nodded gravely at the seemingly paradoxical speech. He understood what the prophet was trying to convey.

Kessel the Fifth stared at his son with sparkling eyes. He turned his head slightly to the side, and murmured to Jines who was by his side, "Did that child learn about eloquence and speech from Gilbert, or learn reasoning and observation skills from you?"

"Neither." Jines stared at the center of the court, at that boy who was talking and explaining in such a serious manner. A bitter yet gratified smile appeared on her face. "That child is rather unique."

"Rather unique." Kessel the Fifth pondered for a moment before he snorted lightly, his features clouded up with gloom and mixed emotions. "You are right. He is just like his mother."

Jines' expression froze.

Kessel's switched his gaze back onto Thales.

"Enough!"

Koshder slammed against the arm of the stone chair furiously and cut off Thales' speech. He glared indignantly at Kessel's relishing gaze. "Your Majesty, it is time for this farce to end... Our main point is..."

"Nanchester's One-Eyed Dragon! Why are you in such a hurry?"

Everyone turned around and, to their surprise, the person who spoke was the Duke of the Northern Territory!

Val coldly raised his head. "Why is it unfavorable for you if he continues his speech?"

Koshder was left with his tongue tied.

Val's eyes were raging flames. He turned his head around and stared at that haggard, horrible-looking man. Then, with words that contained an underlying meaning and were as sharp as blades, he said, "As for you, Fakenhaz, you old bones, under these circumstances, it was a wonder that you were not gloating over the misfortune, nor giving out sarcastic remarks. This is very uncommon of you."

"Thank you for reminding me. I was just about to start, ha ha..." Cyril Fakenhaz, who was slower to catch up than others, pointed his finger and guffawed at Zayen who had an incredibly sour look on his face.

But only for those who knew him the best could tell that his laughter was insipid. "Seems that you have been made a fool by others, you immature young duke!"

Val stared at the plump duke across from him and said disdainfully, "As for you, Duke Cullen, our prime minister, you are still as dependable as before."

Duke Cullen smiled at the comment in an ingenuous manner. Zayen tightened his fist while maintaining what was left of his bearings, trying hard not to look at those people.

Those people.

'If... if I'm dead... Out of those people, who would benefit?' He began to consider about the issues as he could not control the growing suspicion in his heart.

Zayen tried his best to smile despite looking slightly pale for his complexion. He spoke weakly, "Enough, child. No matter what you say, there is still no evidence..."

"Your Grace!"

Thales stared at this young duke, his eyes cold and distant as he purposely avoided the 'evidence' that was just brought up. He deliberately coaxed the thoughts of both the duke and those who were listening to the direction he wanted. "What position exactly did you have in the group that consists of people who care about the throne?"

"Yes, this does not make any sense. You are not the only one in the group. Your group does not consist of just one person. If you were murdered, the rest of the group would feel unsafe and become paranoid. Then, the alliance would break by itself."

Thales sighed again, "Why would the person behind this have the intention to kill you, to carry out actions that would destroy the plan? Unless, there is a more terrifying possibility."

Zayen closed his eyes and lowered his head slightly. He was not a fool.

Thales moved around Zayen in a circle. With a sympathetic look on his face, he patted the shoulder of the Iris Flowers' master. "The possibility is that all the other members of the group knew that you are meant to be the sacrificial lamb. Your death is a part of the plan. You are the one who was betrayed, and the only one who was abandoned."

"This makes sense. You are young and promising. You have excellent skills and approaches towards matters. You came from a rich family and you have high popularity among the people. If you made your way up to the throne, even if it is just a throne you obtained by means of selecting a king, it will only take a few years for Covendier to become another Jadestar Royal Family who will begin to control and regulate the suzerains. Even if age is a factor, for your age, you will still live longer than any one of them."

"If that is the case, what would be the difference of them trying to change the royal family in the first place? If the Tricolor Iris Flowers' master was murdered in the capital, the nobles would become more terrified, the pressure for the war would increase, the blame that His Majesty has to bear would increase, and the scheme in forcefully deciding an heir would perhaps become easier and smoother. The crown would also be worn by the person whom they favor more."

Zayen's expression was indifferent, but everyone else could tell that his gaze had stopped moving for quite some time.

Thales shook his head in a comical manner, as if he was an adult. "Before you have the chance to wear that crown, you have already been betrayed. It all boils down to the fact that you are still far too young and careless in befriending others."

Thales walked back to Kessel's side, and coldly continued, "They probably borrowed a great amount from you and the Covendier Family's power, and have been making preparations for a very long time. But no matter what they promised you, they will not fulfill that promise.

"Please think about it carefully, and then reconsider your stance. You are a wise person, which side are you more likely to choose as your ally? Who would provide the greatest benefit towards Iris Flowers' growth as the king?"

Zayen kept his glance away from Thales while remaining silent. He stared fixedly at the floor beneath him, as if he was interested in the pattern of the floor tiles.

At this moment, Thales suddenly snapped his head around. He cried in a strange manner at the suzerains on the stone seats, "Do not move."

Many of the suzerains furrowed their brows. Thales carefully swept his gaze over everyone's faces, as if he was inspecting them down to their every pore.

He coldly said, "Do not move. Those who betrayed Zayen, do not turn your heads or move away your gaze. Look into my eyes... I can sense your guilt and fear from your expressions."

Zayen raised his head abruptly and stared at the suzerains. Some of their breaths stopped during that instance!

But the next moment, Thales' whole frame became loose as he relaxed. He opened his palms and giggled, "You do not have to be nervous. I was only kidding."

Some of the suzerains released the breath they were holding. They clenched their teeth and balled up their fists tightly as they glared at Thales.

'Did he do that on purpose?'

Thales looked at the suzerains as his expression became solemn once more. "But after seeing Iris Flowers' example, you should understand that once Jadestar has no heir, regardless of which other clan or distinguished family succeeds the throne, no matter if it is before or after the ascension, no matter for whether they are weak or strong, the new royal family will eventually become the next target of the suzerains.

"Without any external forces from other enemies, you will begin fighting against each other over the uneven distribution of power until the fall of Constellation itself.

"I do not care who the one that formed the conspiracy plan is, nor do I care about who is the one that wants the throne. Since, for most of you, it is a conclusion set in stone that the royal family has no heir, and naturally, you would want to choose the future that is most beneficial for yourself.

"However, I am already standing here. For the peace and stability of Constellation, and also for your own benefit. The succession of the Jadestar Royal Family is the biggest hope for Constellation's stability.

"Everyone, for everything, please be like your ancestors and support Jadestar firmly and unwaveringly. Please support me."

The crowd's discussion became increasingly louder, and some people began to applaud.

Coincidentally, the hurrah from the plaza also came through tier by tier. It was unknown which sentence exactly the guards had passed from inside the hall.

Thales did not look at the suzerains' expressions. In fact, he enjoyed it even more to imagine their expressions.

Gilbert finally let out a long exhale and whispered to Thales, who was walking back to him, "That certainly... left a great impression on the people, my young Sir."

Gilbert lowered his head and whispered his question, "The threat brought on by Iris Flowers has already disappeared amid his own suspicions and doubts. The Great Deer Antler's power and influence also decreased greatly, but how were you certain that those assassins were targeting Iris Flowers?"

"Of course I am not sure." Thales flashed him a smile, and with a bright glint in his eyes, he stared at Zayen, who had his head lowered in pensive silence and had yet to

Speak up. "But he also has no knowledge on that, does he?"

"You have to grasp the main point in everything you do. What really matters is not the assassins, but rather, the fact that Zayen saw those assassins with his own eyes."

Thales could feel Kessel the Fifth's serious gaze on him. He tried to maintain his normal breathing under the considerable stress, and said with a relaxed tone, "It's just like what happened just now, what really mattered was not the possible recognition of my identity, but about the people who were unwilling to acknowledge my identity."

"I still have one more thing to say. Even though it was emotionally satisfying, the behavior you demonstrated just now was not the most brilliant political move," under Thales' puzzled gaze, Gilbert released a long sigh and whispered, "You will understand this later."

"Stop the nonsense right now! This is utterly futile and useless!"

The raging One-Eyed Dragon, Duke Nanchester, slammed against the stone seat hard and swept his gaze over the crowd with a menacing and oppressing glare. "Did everyone forget? Until now, he has yet to prove his own identity!"

"His Majesty did not have any sons for a whole twelve years, then all of a sudden, a child of six or seven years of age suddenly jumps out and claims that he is the descendant of the royal family? And he even gave wild statements and speeches at this National Conference..."

Thales sighed and cut him off loudly by saying, "Duke Koshder Nanchester, why are you still dwelling over my identity? Do you still not understand? My father had prepared for this a long time ago."

Thales tilted his head slightly and gave a pure smile. "I thought hypocrites like you, who worry about the nation and the people on the surface, should be elated over the return of Jadestar's blood."

An inauspicious feeling rose in One-Eyed Dragon's heart.

At this moment, the crowd once again burst into uproar. Someone new was stepping into the Hall of Stars.

Thales turned his head around and his eyes immediately lit up.

A beautiful woman with an elegant demeanor—dressed in a dark, ceremonial robe with an image of half a red sun woven onto it—slowly walked across the lane which was forcefully separated by the royal guards, and accompanied by a nervous young priestess.

Many of the commoners kneeled down devoutly and prayed towards the woman with their heads lowered. Many of the nobles already understood something the moment they noticed that halved red sun.

"Very good." Fakenhaz narrowed his eyes. "King, nobles, and also Gods; all three main pillars of Constellation are here."

The pupils of the Duke of the Northern Territory narrowed in response at the very moment he saw the newcomer, and his body moved forward uncontrollably.

"Starting from this very moment, be careful with your words and behaviors." Count Karabeyan solemnly turned his head towards his wife and nephew.

Count Derek Kroma, who was just as surprised, whispered, "Things have already gotten out of hand for the suzerains. I am afraid that the Gods have also participated in this."

Under the watchful eyes of the crowd, the human spokesperson of the Sunset Goddess, the Head Ritual Master of the Sunset Temple, Liscia Arunde, gracefully stepped onto the stone seats' region.

"Liscia." Val Arunde was stunned. His originally desolate expression turned complicated when he saw his little sister.

'It has been so many years... '

But the Head Ritual Master did not spare one glance at her own brother as she kept walking forward slowly.

Koshder looked appalled. He wanted to exchange a glance with Zayen like how they usually would, but he discovered that Zayen was cold and callous, without giving him a single look.

The One-Eyed Dragon's heart became bitter and astringent.

Kessel the Fifth stood up solemnly. "Head Ritual Master, Liscia. The spokesperson of the Sunset Temple and the Sunset Goddess.

"The authority from the king, the oath from the nobles, and the witness from the gods—these are the three most important testimonials, concurrent to when Constellation was founded.

"After over six hundred years, today, please let the Sunset Goddess witness the continuation of Constellation's royal bloodline as before."

The whole hall burst into uproar once more.

The expressionless Liscia bowed down and nodded her head slightly. But she did not immediately reply. Instead, she kneeled down on the ground with her head facing the sky and closed her eyes.

Thales stared curiously at this Head Ritual Master who did not really like him. 'Is she communicating with the Gods now?'

But suddenly, Thales felt an indescribable feeling in his heart which caused him to feel very awful and unwell.

A noise that was similar to ringing suddenly went off!

Beep!

He was horrifically frightened. As he forcefully held back the desire to cover his ears with his hands, he surveyed his surroundings.

Everyone in the hall, regardless of nobles or commoners, did not make a sound, nor did they show any sign of intolerance.

'Could it be...?'

When that ringing noise disappeared, everyone around him was normal. Could he be the only one who heard the ringing noise?

All this time, the boy did not know what the Gods in this world truly were. But now...

Another question was added to Thales' heart.

After a while, Liscia gently opened her eyes as she stood up and said, "The Goddess has responded, Your Majesty."

Duke Cullen sighed. He already knew the conclusion of the matter.

Koshder clenched his fists tightly as his eyes glinted like frost and snow.

Fakenhaz laughed drily.

Zayen, on the other hand, was thoughtfully looking at Thales, who was the focus of the hall.

Kessel the Fifth gently nodded his head. He suddenly grabbed Thales' hand, and his abrupt move frightened the boy!

"Come with me," Kessel said firmly and unquestionably, "Every one of Constellation should see your blood."

Thales let Kessel the Fifth hold him. With his eyes fixed and his mouth wide open in shock, they walked towards the balcony overseeing the Star Plaza from the round stage consisting of the stone seats.

Truthfully, he had yet to become accustomed to this.

Maybe it was because, from the bottom of his heart, he still had not regarded this strong man as his father?

The nineteen noble suzerains stood up from their stone seats and followed the king and his son to the spacious balcony. Many of the surrounding intermediate or minor nobles wanted to follow, but were relentlessly held back by royal guards' erosion shields.

Thales walked to the edge of the balcony and looked downwards. It was after noon, and the weather was just right. He then held his breath immediately.

People. There were so many people! A thick swarm of them! The entire Star Plaza was full of people! There were at least a few tens upon thousands of them. They took up the entire lower half of his vision like ants covering the entire ground!

It was not the first time Thales had been to the Star Plaza. He had also once stood on

the Star Plaza looking up at the magnificent Renaissance Palace.

But he had never before stood in the Hall of Stars' balcony inside of Renaissance Palace and looked down at the entire Star Plaza!

Even though Thales had two different sets of memories belonging to two different lives, he still could not help but gape at the scene.

Soon, the crowd on the plaza vaguely noticed that there were two more people on the balcony.

Once they confirmed that the two people were the king and his kin, an unprecedented, earth-shattering hurrah was heard from the crowd on the plaza!

"King! King!"

"Long live Jadestar!"

"Constellation! Constellation!"

Kessel was still gripping Thales' hand as he slowly said, "Do you see? These are our subjects, our burden, and our responsibility."

The almighty king asked meaningfully, "Are you ready to live for Constellation?"

Without waiting for Thales' reply, Liscia walked towards them with a cold look on her face. The young priestess with her seemed very nervous. She was trembling as she held out a platter with a rare and precious dagger on it under Liscia's signal.

"The Bloodline Ceremony?"

Duke Cullen walked towards the balcony with the help of his two attendants and shook his head. "It has been almost two hundred years since the ritual was used. Prince Keira's Bloodline Recognition Ceremony... when was the last time it was carried out?"

No one answered him.

The Duke of the Northern Territory stared at his little sister, whom he had not seen for many years, in a daze. However, Liscia did not spare him a single glance.

The elegant and graceful Head Ritual Master slowly walked to the spot in between the king and Thales.

Under the watchful eyes of the entire plaza, Kessel gently picked up the dagger and sliced open his left forefinger, then he put the dagger back on the platter.

The priestess held the platter out to Thales. She was only eleven or twelve years old, but it appeared that this was her first time being in such a situation, where she was watched attentively by thousands of people. She trembled nervously.

"You do not have to be nervous, everything is fine." Thales smiled at her as he picked up the dagger with the symbol of a red sun engraved upon it and sliced open his left palm.

Without any emotions on her face, Liscia extended her hands to hold both the king and Thales. She then lifted her head.

It was totally different from the type of long and tedious praying ceremony which Thales anticipated because at the very next moment, the exact same glaring light, from when Liscia and Thales were in the stone room, exploded out from Liscia's eyes.

The people from both the balcony and behind the balcony who were fighting to watch the event fell into a sudden silence. Many of the commoners started to kneel down as they prayed with their eyes closed from the bright light from the middle of the balcony.

The brilliant rays became brighter and brighter!

Even the people in the plaza, under broad daylight, could begin to clearly see what was happening on the balcony!

The people in the plaza were mostly commoners who had no right to enter the Hall of Stars.

Almost everyone in the plaza knelt down devoutly and prayed in the direction of Renaissance Palace above their heads.

The kneeling of the believers made the whole Star Plaza appear as if a tidal wave was surging forward from the Hall of Stars' balcony.

But Thales did not have the energy to focus on this amazing view. The boy discovered,

to his surprise, that the blood from both his and Kessel's palms were floating within the bright ray from the head ritual master's eyes!

And then it combined into a single red ray of light.

'This is...?'

Thales stared at that light in puzzlement.

An accident happened in that very moment!

Chapter 64

Put to Vote

Beep!

Thales heard the strange ringing in his ears again!

This time, Thales lowered his head in pain, his face contorted.

Compared to just now, the ringing in his ears this time was especially loud. It was almost as loud as the magic sound from the psionic assassin yesterday!

'What on earth is this?'

Thales endured the pain as he knew that he could not make any mistakes at this time. All the people from the capital city were witnessing this moment!

Liscia's glowing eyes looked towards him in puzzlement. The light became increasingly brighter!

It was so jarring that all the people on the balcony raised their hands or turned their heads away. Even the five dukes, who stood the closest, could not see clearly nor hear the things happening at the center.

Under the bright light, Thales was also slowly becoming unable to see the situation outside clearly.

Amid the painful ringing in his ears, Thales could barely see Liscia and Kessel's silhouette. He was starting to grit his teeth, enduring the torment of this ringing in his ears. The boy's abnormality was subsequently noticed.

Liscia's eyes, which were shining with bright light, closed and opened. She then asked in bewilderment, "You? Why are you...?"

'What is going on?' Thales felt inexplicably anxious.

At that moment, Thales could clearly see King Kessel's robust figure. Amid the light, the king suddenly turned his head.

"Liscia..." the king spoke softly. Only Liscia and Thales, who were the nearest to him, could hear it.

For some reason, Kessel the Fifth was not authoritative and cold like usual. This time, his tone was a pleading and helpless one!

The dignified Supreme King of Constellation pleaded in a soft and submissive tone, "Please. This is the future of Constellation, and also Midier's long-cherished wish."

For some reason, Liscia's hands that were holding on to both their hands trembled slightly.

However, she then turned her head and looked towards the king. Liscia asked in disbelief, "Her... it's her?"

But the king did not answer her.

The next moment, the light disappeared. The ringing in Thales' ears also disappeared.

Finally free from the ringing in his ears, Thales sighed in relief. He took huge, deep breaths.

'What on... what on earth is going on? The ringing in my ears, the Head Ritual Master's suspicion, the king's pleading... '

He recovered from his stupor and the people on the balcony returned to his vision.

The only thing remaining in the air was a streak of red light which connected Thales and Kessel's wounds.

After being under everyone's astonished, delighted, disappointed, and complicated gazes for over ten seconds, that streak of red light finally disappeared too.

Liscia's expression at the moment was one of extreme fatigue. She raised her head and gave Kessel a profound glance. Kessel the Fifth did not speak. He calmly endured her gaze.

Liscia glanced at Thales again. This time, without mistake, Thales saw surprise, disgust, and... fear in her eyes?

The nobles around them were holding their breaths as they watched everything.

Thales knew that it was not the right occasion. He could only grit his teeth and bury his qualms—along with the pain of that ringing in his ears—in his heart.

Just like what he did to the other countless number of mysteries.

The Head Ritual Master of Sunset Temple turned her head and gave Kessel a complicated and pain-filled glance before she feebly announced, "The Goddess has decreed that these two are father and son. Their blood is related, and their fates are interlocked."

Having said that, the Head Ritual Master left decisively by the side of the hall. Amid the people in the crowd, who were worshipping her on bended knee, she left the balcony. She did not glance at anyone nor at anything in the hall—without any hint of attachment to the people in there.

Only the silent Kessel and the shocked Thales were left there.

The child priestess anxiously glanced at the two of them before hurriedly picking up the salver and leaving, too.

The next moment, a cheer erupted in the Hall of Stars which had been silent because of the Bloodline Ceremony.

Under Gilbert's prompting, the guards passed the messages to the plaza.

After twelve years, the Jadestar Royal Family finally had a new member.

The commotion on the balcony soon turned into one that affected the entire plaza, a revelry that affected tens upon thousands of people!

"Jadestar- Jadestar-"

The cheers were almost reverberating through the vaults of heaven!

The expressions of Koshder and the few counts became one of defeat.

Gilbert and those from the king's partisan excitedly exchanged glances. Jines was the only one whose gaze also carried obscure and complicated emotions apart from delight as she watched Liscia's back.

The plump duke exhaled, his expression was filled with delight. "Alright, since the Sunset Temple has acknowledged this child's bloodline, I believe that he is indeed, unmistakably, His Majesty's blood descendant."

Koshder, who was beside him, stared at Duke Cullen coldly. 'What a sly old fox; he changed sides so rapidly.'

"According to the 'Holy Constitution of Constellation', after the royal family and Sunset Temple both acknowledge his status, the next procedure would be for Constellation's Higher Parliament, which is comprised of us, the nineteen nobles, to acknowledge his status; to acknowledge that this child is a prince of Constellation," Duke Cullen said with a smile as he stood on the balcony, with the cheers from the plaza serving as background noise.

"Wait!" Koshder gritted his teeth and said the following words, "I remember that no matter who this child's mother is, it is not Queen Keya?"

The expressions of many of the nobles present immediately changed. Gilbert's expression also immediately became unpleasant. Kessel the Fifth turned his head and looked towards Koshder.

The mayor of Steep Forest City and the Duke of the Land of Cliffs, Koshder Nanchester, exhaled. "This child is His Majesty's illegitimate son!"

Thales clenched his fists tightly. 'As expected, my status... '

Count Dagestan was the first one to react. "Yes. According to the constitution of Constellation, an illegitimate son does not have the right of succession!"

The conversation on the balcony could not be heard clearly in the hall. However, the nobles sitting at the front who were the closest to the balcony were passing down the conversation. Hence, the entire Hall of Stars still burst into an uproar!

"Tormond the First was also an illegitimate son!" Gilbert's eyes were blazing. "And he is the King of Renaissance that all your ancestors pledged their loyalty to!"

"Tormond the First's mightiness is not due to the imperial blood from the Empire flowing in him. He built Constellation through personal struggles, countless conquests, and blood baths. It was the same with our ancestors. Do not forget that six hundred years ago, many of them were their family's illegitimate sons, sons of extended families, or frustrated knights. They worked for their status with their hands," Count Sorel, whose territory was within the Land of Cliffs, added to what the Duke of the Land of Cliffs said.

"Is this illegitimate son five or six years old? What has he done to deserve the right to inherit this great kingdom left behind by Tormond the First, like a son born from wedlock, without being constrained by his status as an illegitimate son?"

The One-Eyed Dragon's gaze was chilling. "Your Majesty, of course we should acknowledge him as your son, and as a blood descendant of Jadestar. This is the Goddess' will. However, if you want to acknowledge that he is a prince with the right to succession... An illegitimate son as our next king? At least I will not be bending my knees and pledging myself to him!"

The Duke of the Northern Territory watched the One-Eyed Dragon, there was sadness and resignation in his gaze. "You just refuse to give up. Right, Koshder? Even if it is for Constellation, for the impending war?"

Koshder deliberately avoided Val's gaze. He only stared at Kessel the Fifth.

The shady Duke Fakenhaz gave a hollow laugh and said, "Of course he will not give up. He has become arch enemies with this child, hasn't he?"

Thales' heart skipped a beat.

He suddenly understood what Gilbert meant just now by telling him that he did not make a brilliant political move.

He had angrily denounced Nanchester and lured out the secret organization just now. He then targeted Covendier. This act removed the Tricolor Iris Flowers from the list of enemies, and planted the seeds of doubt in him. However, it also thoroughly made the Land of Cliff's Koshder Nanchester, the Great Deer Antler, his arch enemy.

It can be said that Koshder Nanchester's initial aim was to strive for the greatest gains on behalf of the organization of nobles, in face of the royal family that was doomed to be heirless. But now, the Great Deer Antler's aim changed into 'not letting Thales

inherit the kingdom'. This was for the sake of the Great Deer Antler's future survival.

Had he, after all, been too impulsive just now? Thales discreetly clenched his fist.

"You all saw that. The child has a dark personality and is not of a generous disposition. He is unsettled and disturbed over the fact that he encountered assassination, and harbors doubt towards all of us." The One-Eyed Dragon took a step forward on the balcony. Although his voice was low, the words he said were bone-chilling, "That is why, out of nowhere, he made up the alleged conspiracy about us planning to usurp the throne. Do you think he will easily let go of you all—the ones he once suspected to be the manipulators of the things he experienced—once he takes the throne?"

The suzerains furrowed their brows simultaneously. A few watching Thales in contemplation.

Koshder continued with his criticisms, "There is only one 'virtuous king' in Constellation's history! And that is Prince Midier, whom all of you have met, and who was kind-hearted, fair of mind, and tolerant!"

Kessel furrowed his brows deeply.

"Whether you participated in his fabricated organization or not, you all are already on his blacklist. Many years later, after he takes the throne, are you certain that he would remember today, and remember you all?

"Hmph, the ruin of Constellation? Only when a day comes when all the nobles feel that they are in danger, then that would be true ruin!"

Gilbert gritted his teeth. Koshder had grasped onto the thing that the nobles were most afraid of.

Kessel the Fifth lowered his head and glanced at the pale-stricken Thales.

"Even if it was for the sake of Constellation's future and stability, Your Majesty, are you sure that choosing such an heir will not push Constellation towards the abyss of fragmentation and ruin?"

The other counts looked at each other and did not say anything. They contemplated Koshder's words until one of them broke the silence. Count Dagestan coughed and spoke with his brows furrowed, "Yes. Going back to the main topic, I, too, feel that right

now, having an illegitimate son of low status as the Supreme King of Constellations is not very appropriate... Even though the royal family and the temple have already made their decisions, we, the Higher Parliament, should still be more careful..." He looked at Thales, who had not yet recovered from the aftershock of the Bloodline Ceremony. However, his gaze was no longer rude and scrutinizing. Instead, it was prudent and careful.

Kessel the Fifth knocked his scepter on the floor and spoke calmly, "It seems that it is indeed difficult for all suzerains to reach a common outlook, is it not?"

"Then, let us take the final step. The members of the Higher Parliament can decide their stance towards this child through voting."

Thales exhaled deeply. 'So, in the end, I still could not hold my fate in my own hands?'

The supreme king looked towards the side at Duke Cullen, who was being supported by someone.

Duke Cullen sighed and nodded slightly. "The vassals from Blade Edge Hill are not present, reducing the total number of votes by three. However, the remaining five guardian dukes and eleven counts—amounting sixteen high-level vassals—still have the right to make this decision."

The plump duke widened his eyes slightly. "Gentlemen, should this child be a Prince of Constellation who has the right to succession?"

Jines, who was standing behind the king, could not hold it in anymore. She furiously bellowed, "Hey! Why does a prince of the royal family have to be acknowledged by the Higher Parliament?"

The dukes and the counts ignored her. Only Koshder snorted softly.

The One-Eyed Dragon said in a derisive tone, "This is men's business. Ladies, please remain silent."

"Because this child is involved with the right to succeed the throne, this is a pledge from the day Constellation was founded," the old Count Karabeyan said at this moment, and relieved Jines' embarrassment. He sighed softly and continued, "The king and the suzerains ruled the kingdom together in the hopes that dictators such as those in the era of the Empire never appear again."

Duke Cullen glanced at Thales. "According to the rules Mindis the Third set a hundred and fifty years ago, as long as the votes tally over half, it will be effective. If the votes are less than half or exactly half, this child would be an illegitimate son who only has the right to inherit assets.

"The voting begins."

Chapter 65

Lyanna Tabark

"Nay!" Koshder shouted loudly, "Those who want to see an utterly chaotic Constellation, feel free to vote 'aye'!"

"Nay!"

"Nay!"

Both Sorel of the Land of Cliffs Region and Count Dagestan followed.

Val Arunde furrowed his brows and said, "I do not know what this will bring to the war ahead..."

Koshder solemnly said, "Sir Val, the entire Land of Cliffs' military will step forward, and the promise to support the Northern Territory is still in effect. The Land of Cliffs adjoins the Northern Territory, it would never stand by helplessly and let its friends succumb to the flames of war. You know, we are the closest and we are more effective than the royal family in providing military forces to help.

"But I am very worried that the future of Constellation could be ruined in the hands of this illegitimate child whom all of the vassals are wary of, and is also wary of all the vassals himself."

Koshder's single eye stared intently at Val, his expression was serious.

Val fell into silence for a very long time before he finally sighed.

This warrior suzerain who seemed to be made out of iron, desolately said, "This is for the Northern Territory and for Arunde."

Unnoticed by the others, Kessel the Fifth grasped his scepter even tighter than before.

"Nay," the Duke of the Northern Territory voiced despondently.

Count Zemunto and Count Friess also deeply sighed.

"Nay."

"Nay."

"Six people have opposed," Duke Cullen said expressionlessly.

Jines stared in disbelief at the Duke of the Northern Territory.

Thales, on the other hand, weakly shut his eyes.

"Count Talon!

Koshder faintly said to the Five-Pointed Star's Count Bern Talon, who was among the sixteen people there. "I know your dominion is just near the Central Territory and you have a good relationship with the royal family, us dukes are indeed unsuited to succeed the throne.

"But you are different! The Five-Pointed Star is the branch of the Nine-Pointed Star." Koshder raised his hand, his speech was bewitching. "If the king does not have an appointed heir, I believe you would be on the list of candidates."

Everyone's gaze turned towards Count Talon.

Bern Talon was drenched in cold sweat. He looked towards Kessel the Fifth, but the latter just stared coldly back at him.

"Of course, as a powerful competitor for the throne, could this child think that you are a part of those evil schemes as well?" Koshder asked with a smile.

Thales started to feel anxious. He was just about to speak up before the king held him back.

Kessel the Fifth closed his eyes and spoke with a dignified voice, "Bern, just follow your heart. After all, the Five-Pointed Star is not a Nine-Pointed Star."

Bern Talon was hesitant. He took a deep breath before he finally hung his head dispiritedly and said, "The Talon Family... will forfeit!"

Many of the suzerains furrowed their brows again.

Koshder smiled without saying another word.

The Talon of the Five-Pointed Star was the only one out of the Thirteen Distinguished Families who was conferred the title of count, and was not located around the Six Great Clans' territory. They were neighbors to the Royal Family's Central Territory, and they had always been Jadestar's biggest and strongest supporter.

But now, they...

At this very moment, a voice could be heard.

"Aye!"

Everyone turned in astonishment, only to find the person who voiced up to be Zayen Covendier. He had remained silent for a very long time.

He was the first one to endorse Thales.

They found that Zayen, the Duke of Iris Flowers, who governed the South Coast Hill was staring coldly at Koshder, whose expression was initially stunned, but later turned bitter and frosty.

Thales was stunned as he stared at Zayen, but Zayen did not seem like he was about to meet Thales' gaze.

Count Karabeyan and Count Lascia nodded. They walked forwards at the same time.

"Aye."

"Aye!"

Gilbert whispered to Thales. "It seems like your strategy is still working. Under this circumstance, we are still able to win over valuable support."

Duke Fakenhaz of Western Desert Hill suddenly let out a sharp laugh.

"Haha, I vote 'yes'!"

"Nay!"

"Nay!"

Both Kroma and Bozdorf also voiced up.

Under many people's puzzlement, Koshder angrily yelled, "Old bones! Why—"

Fakenhaz cut Koshder off and laughed. "Why did I vote differently than Count Kroma and Count Bozdorf? Oh my, my, I am not their conferred ruler. I cannot govern them. Is that not very normal?"

He stared cynically at the other few dukes. "After all, the Thirteen Distinguished Families are not the 'guard dogs' for us Six Great Clans!"

Many of the suzerains turned their heads around, their faces red.

However, many of the king's partisan sighed and lowered their heads after counting the votes.

"Eight people opposed, four people agreed, and one person forfeited."

With a trembling voice, Duke Cullen said, "Out of the sixteen people here, more than half have already objected. It seems like we do not need to proceed any further."

Gilbert lightly sighed.

After Thales listened to the results, he could only give a bitter smile.

'Am I still too naïve?'

For some unknown reason, Kessel the Fifth was able to remain expressionless even at this moment. People could only sigh and think that, after all, he was the supreme king, and this was the reason why he was able to remain this calm.

At a corner some distance away, Morat let loose a faint laugh. The Chief of the Secret Intelligence Department whispered, "Even though the child gave a brilliant performance, it still seems like we have to use the back-up plan now. Are you ready for it?"

Raphael tightened his gloves as he replied joyfully, "Despite being a little taken by surprise, we can have nothing go wrong at this stage."

"Since the results are final, everyone, please not feel guilty anymore!" Koshder smiled as he looked at the suzerains, each one of them wearing a different expression on their faces. He then said, "If you need a personal reason, this is for your own family. If you need an official reason..." Koshder looked scornfully at Jines, who gritted her teeth in anger, and at Thales, who looked defeated.

"Constellation cannot be governed by an ignorant woman and a child!"

Right at this moment, a crisp but rich young, female voice was heard from a distance.

"Ignorant woman and child?"

The crowd burst into a commotion!

All the nobles on the balcony turned their heads and started to exchange whispers with one another after seeing the person who came.

"But I am ignorant too."

The crisp and cold female voice seemed to have its own magical power, making its way through the crowd.

"I am also young and immature."

Thales stretched his neck forward in bewilderment.

"Furthermore, I am a woman!"

The crowd was seen to separate under the royal guards' reprimand.

A teenage girl of fourteen or fifteen years of age walked out from the crowd. Her chestnut-colored hair was draped over her shoulder and her pretty face was still visibly young as well as tender.

However, at that moment, the teenage girl's expression was icy cold and stern as she stared at everyone standing on the balcony with a fierce gaze.

She was wearing a pitch-black cape and leather boots with spurs on them. Her hunter's attire, which consisted of purple and black shades weaving between each other, dazzled the people who gazed at her.

She wore a brooch on her left shoulder, and the pattern on the brooch looked like a blood red, new moon.

Without knowing why, Thales felt like this teenage girl with chestnut hair was trying her best to look cold and stern.

The sounds of discussion from the crowd became increasingly louder.

Many of the suzerains exchanged whispers in each other's ears after seeing the blood red new moon, whilst all the dukes furrowed their brows.

There were two nobles following the teenage girl with chestnut-colored hair. One of them was a smiling, strong man with pale blond hair. He was in his prime years and his clothing had a gold sunflower woven onto it. Another noble was a middle-aged man with long hair and gloomy eyes. A three-tailed big fish was woven onto his sleeve. The mouth of the fish was sinisterly wide, exposing densely packed, sharp teeth on the inside.

"I am precisely the one who is claimed to be an ignorant woman and a child."

The teenage girl walked towards Koshder. He was astonished. She lifted her head in arrogance, staring menacingly at the one-eyed man, who was a head taller than her.

"I am the one who governs the Blade Edge Hill of Constellation!"

The chestnut-haired girl's voice became icy cold. "Do you have anything to say, Duke Nanchester, whom I am meeting for the first time today?"

Koshder stared at her in disbelief. his only eye reflected his emotional turmoil. "You are... Blood Moon, the Tabark Family. Duchess of Blade Edge Hill?"

The teenage girl with chestnut hair ignored him. She walked straight towards the king and knelt down on one knee in front of him.

"Lyanna Tabark." Kessel sighed as he reached his right hand out with a nostalgic look on his face.

"The last time I saw you should be around twelve years ago. You were only three years old at that time. I remember Sonia bringing John's body back to Eternal Star. She was holding you in her arms as tears were streaming down her face. She told me that you would be the next Duchess of Tabark."

Duchess Lyanna Tabark, the serious-looking teenage girl lightly kissed the king's ring, and solemnly said, "Your Majesty, I would never forget the kindness shown by you, Her Excellency Fortress Flower and the late Duke of Star Lake!"

"Is this the only remaining orphan in Tabark Family who was rescued by the Duke of Star Lake from the rebel army during the Bloody Year?" Duke Val sighed and stared at the strong teenage girl, who was even younger than his own daughter. "The Southwest Territory is a long distance away, and the journey here is extremely difficult. I thought you are not able to make it here."

'Is this teenage girl really the remaining orphan of Tabark Family, who was entirely murdered by the rebel army of the Six southwestern cities during the Bloody Year?'

Val glanced at Kessel and sighed. 'This is similar to the Jadestar Family.'

"It took some time for me to gather the vassals and also recruit soldiers." Lyanna bowed before the Iron Eagle with great respect. "Please be at ease. Since the kingdom is in trouble, Tabark must give all we can, regardless of any sacrifices, reciprocation, gains, and failures!"

After listening to her speech, some counts snuck a look at Koshder. Meanwhile, the latter snorted and turned his head away.

"The vow is everlasting. Even if we are attacked by knives and swords, even if blood spills all over the ground, the Blood Moon will always stand by the side of the Nine-Pointed Star Family!"

Kessel the Fifth stared at this teenage girl, who looked firm and resolute. He slowly nodded his head, and noticed the two nobles behind her walking forward to kneel down and kiss his ring.

Kessel earnestly said, "Seucader, and also Kisen, I hope both of you are working closely together and helping one another. I hope the tragedy of the Bloody Year will never happen again."

"Of course, Your Majesty." Bruce Seucader, who was in his prime, gave a prudent smile. "Even though the Sunflower is located abroad by itself, it will always be related to Constellation."

Gunther Kisen swept over the entire place with his cold eyes. "The Piranhas will swallow everything that harms the Blood Moon and those enemies who harm the Nine-Pointed Star, regardless whether the harm is from within or outside the country."

"Oh my, my, as expected of the General Edict of Constellation!" Fakenhaz guffawed with his horrible and cynical laugh as he applauded. He then spoke again at the perfect moment, "All of the Six Great Clans and the Thirteen Distinguished Families are gathered here in the Royal Capital!

"It is a scene which has not been seen since twelve years ago!"

Cyril kept on laughing sharply while he continued, "If there is no war with Eckstedt, it would be even better... of course, if there is no war, all of us would not need to be here too!"

Nobody paid him any attention. Everyone was speculating how things would be affected with the sudden arrival of the Three Great Clans from Southwest Blade Edge Hill and how their standpoints would also influence the situation.

Koshder's expression immediately changed. He looked at Duke Cullen. His eyes were filled with urgency.

But the old Guardian Duke of the Eastern Sea did not spare him a glance. He spoke with his trembling voice, "Just right, this... Duchess Lyanna—"

However, he was immediately cut off by the cold-looking teenage girl.

"Enough with your nonsense! I am afraid that if you continue, you are going to have an asthma attack, old man whom I am meeting for the first time."

Duke Cullen choked for a moment as he gaped in shock, not knowing how to react.

The mayor of Blade City, the Duchess of the Blade Edge Hill, Lyanna Tabark agilely turned towards Thales!

'Eh?'

Thales promptly coughed and gave her an affable smile.

Lyanna's sharp gaze sized Thales up, and he found that Lyanna had a pair of green eyes.

He involuntarily stuck his chest out and stood a little more upright. As he was prepared to salute...

"Not bad, you do not look too ugly." Lyanna nodded and snorted coldly.

"Just that you are a little too skinny and short, and your expression is a little too uncultured."

'Expression... a little too uncultured?

'And also... this... '

Thales was stunned as he stood there. He pulled back his hand from the air, in which he was preparing to perform a salute.

He exchanged a glance with Duke Cullen, who was in front of him. Both saw the empathy and understanding in each other's eyes.

Lyanna turned around and stared firmly at all the nobles. Then, she proclaimed loudly, "With regard to the possibility of him becoming the prince... I, Duchess Tabark, vote 'yes'!"

Before everyone could react to the statement, both Count Seucader and Count Kisen stepped forward from behind Lyanna, with one of them faintly smiling and the other glaring at the crowd fiercely. Both of them voiced up.

"Aye!"

Gilbert unconsciously tightened the hand he placed on Thales's shoulder in excitement.

But Thales was too preoccupied to care.

His heart was beating rhythmically once more.

'She agreed?'

The hall burst into an uproar again.

The earth-shattering noise rose up within Star Plaza once more.

Duke Cullen sighed.

"In that case, eight people objected, seven people agreed and one person forfeited.

"And because Tabark Family, Seucader Family and Kisen Family have arrived, all nineteen people of the Higher Parliament are here. Right now, neither one of the opposition's or affirmative's vote is more than half."

"Therefore, only Javea of the Eastern Sea, Count Almond and I are left."

Koshder clenched his fist tight as his heart sank.

'Damn it.

'That little b*tch who governed Tabark, Seucader the upstart, and Kisen, who behaved like a mad dog.

'Were they the long-prepared, hidden forces of the king?

'Impossible, not within such a short amount of time...

'Luckily, Cullen and the two families of Eastern Sea, who are under Cullen's influence, are still on New Star's side... They voted against the boy. The boy will not have the authority to succeed the throne, and we can take our time in making decisions... '

Just as Koshder was being immersed in his own thoughts, Duke Cullen decided to vote.

Chapter 66

End of Arc: Thales Jadestar, The Second Prince

"Cullen Family, aye!"

"Javea, aye!"

"Almond, aye!"

The three agreements were voiced up one after another.

Thales started to shiver as he started to count the number of votes in his mind.

His breathing became involuntarily heavier after the thought.

He looked over to Gilbert and the latter's eyes were filled with excitement, which he was trying very hard to suppress.

On the other hand, Koshder Nanchester had his mouth wide open. He took an entire twenty seconds before he finally understood what had just happened!

He stared in disbelief at the smiling, old Duke Cullen as his breath started to speed up.

Dagestan and Count Sorel who were standing behind him were also staring at each other in disbelief.

What happened?

What happened?!

Cullen was smiling by the time he began counting the votes while huffing and puffing. "In that case, eight people opposed, ten people agreed and one person forfeited. More than half of the people have agreed."

Morat the Black Prophet sighed as he watched the scene. "It seems like we do not have to make an appearance anymore. The back-up plan is cancelled."

"The situation was already decided the moment Iris Flowers switched sides.

"After all, it was the child's strategy that worked."

Raphael gave out a light-hearted smile as he nodded and pulled up his gloves to his wrists.

Duke Cullen squeezed out a smile on his plump face. "The Higher Parliament has already made the decision that the constitution on illegitimate children is unsuited to be used against this child. This child shall have Jadestar as his last name, and he will have all the privileges of a prince.

"The bloodline of Jadestar is now carried on, and Constellation will have an heir.

"Congratulations, Your Majesty."

Finally, Kessel the Fifth stingily gave out a smile and he nodded as a signal towards Gilbert.

The hall once again exploded with the rising commotion.

There were sounds of clapping, hurrahs and shouts. Additionally, there was a crowd, constantly pushing against the royal guards' line of defense.

Koshder did not listen to what Cullen said. He just stared at Duke Cullen, who was in front of him with his only eye, widened.

'Bob Cullen.

'You are the starting point of everything.

'You are...

'But you...

'But...

'You traitor.'

Koshder glared at Duke Cullen as he clenched his teeth together and spat out his

words, "Let him become your future king. You will regret this one day!"

All the dukes had different expressions on their faces. Val was in a stunned state as he stared at Thales whereas Zayen stood with his arms crossed and smiled coldly. Fakenhaz was staring at everyone with a delighted expression on his face. Lyanna's expression was still cold and callous as she occasionally swept her gaze over Thales.

At this moment, Thales' brain was blank.

'Today's obstacle is over?'

With an excited look on his face, Gilbert waved his arm. He then took over a platter, which held a rolled-up document from an attendant beside him.

"Your Majesty, young sir.

"Even though it is a little crude and hurried, but the necessary ceremony must still be performed."

Kessel the Fifth nodded without any expression on his face.

Gilbert's hands were trembling as he passed the sealed scroll with a Nine-Pointed Star symbol on it to the supreme king.

The nobles, who all had different expressions on their faces slowly dispersed. They left the center of the balcony to the father-son pair.

"Kneel down." Kessel the Fifth still had mixed emotions on his face, but he was staring gravely at Thales.

The boy adjusted his own breathing and kneeled down on his knee.

'This day'

He said to himself.

'Has come.'

Even though this was not a future he could choose, he wanted to choose it, or think of choosing it.

However, he was like a small boat, sent drifting by huge waves in this dangerous and unknown world. He had no power in controlling his own destiny.

The fact that he was able to stay alive was already a huge fortune and blessing.

'But now...' Thales gazed at what was in front of him.

Kessel the Fifth opened the seal on top of the scroll and slowly unraveled it.

Thousands upon thousands of people in Star Plaza started to cheer, rave, rise to a clamor and applaud in excitement as they saw a small figure kneel down before the king. Some people even started to rush against the city defense Team and police's line of order.

"Jadestar! Jadestar!"

"In the name of Constellation, Southern Islands and Western Deserts' Thirty-Ninth Supreme King, Kessel Mindis Aydi Jadestar."

Kessel the Fifth stared intently at Thales with his sky-blue pupils as he read the contents of the scroll.

"This person before my eyes will be Jadestar's heir and Constellation's blood!"

"The Sunset Goddess witnessed his bloodline.

"The Jadestar Royal Family vouched for his identity.

"The Higher Parliament recognized his power."

Gods.

King.

Suzerains.

The three main pillars of Constellation.

Thales grabbed his knees increasingly harder with his hand as he involuntarily thought back to the National Conference, which was full of ups and downs.

"Regardless of everything in your past, you will stand up as...

"As..."

Kessel the Fifth suddenly paused at that point of his speech. Unexpectedly, his hand, which held the scroll trembled slightly.

Thales furrowed his brows.

He knew why the king stopped at this very moment.

He knew.

Thales' thoughts traced back to a few hours ago.

...

Gilbert was going over Thales' last name with him at the final hallway leading to the Hall of Stars.

"According to usual practice, royal family members usually have two middle names, with the second one being the father's name and the previous one being an important person who has influenced you... They are usually any famous member in the Royal Family's history, for instance, the Three Constellation Kings whom you previously met, 'Enemy of the Wolves' Keira Jadestar of the supreme class, or Sumer Jadestar, the great musician...

"Are you sure you want to do this? You know... this name is even rarer than 'Thales'. This will..." Gilbert awkwardly followed Thales from behind.

"Yes! Sir Gilbert, I have already decided!"

Thales's eyes were determined as he walked forward one step at a time. "Just like the brand and memory I have, no matter what the cost is, I still do not want to give up.

"I am about to become a Jadestar." He was panting slightly while recalling his experience at the royal family cemetery. "But if I cannot hold my own future in my own hands, at least, please let me have control over my own name."

Thales lifted his head up and walked forward with determination without any sign of

turning back.

Gilbert exchanged a glance with Jines, who had mixed emotions on her face. She nodded begrudgingly.

His Majesty would probably not be happy about this.

...

Return to present time.

Just as the nobles were starting to furrow their brows and discuss about His Majesty the King's peculiar behavior, Kessel the Fifth took a deep breath like he was gathering all of his courage as well as willpower, and he mustered his energy. With his dignified and steady voice, he loudly declared, "You will stand up as...

"Thales TherrenGirana Kessel Jadestar!

"The second prince of Constellation!"

Kessel the Fifth finished reading out the contents of the scroll. Both of his eyes were staring at Thales, but it seemed like he was immersed in his own thoughts.

The nobles started to discuss among themselves.

'TherrenGirana?

'Who is that?'

Thales Jadestar slowly stood up from the ground.

He was a Jadestar now.

The second prince.

And also, the only Prince of Constellation.

The only heir of the supreme king.

The guards hastily passed down the speech one layer after another, until it reached

every corner of the Star Plaza.

Deafening roars and cheers could be heard once again like tidal waves, rising up and down.

But this time, the chaotic but grand cries of the crowd soon became obvious and clear because they had a target to refer to.

"Thales TherrenGirana Kessel Jadestar!

"The second prince! The second prince!

"Thales TherrenGirana Kessel Jadestar!

"The second prince! The second prince!"

Under the earth-shattering, loud hurrahs, Thales looked up to the sky in a daze.

The sun was setting in the east, and it gave out unending, brilliant red rays.

The sunrays shone upon the walls of the majestic Renaissance Palace, making the palace glow in shades of red.

The color was just like blood.

The evening had arrived.

"Today must have been hard on you." Gilbert walked forward in excitement, and lightly bowed before Thales. "Now, please follow me, Your Highness."

...

Somewhere in Eastern Peninsula.

Two men dressed in white robes, which were embroidered with a gold sun were sitting by the bonfire in a murky, ruined building.

The younger one between the two lifted his head and asked curiously, "Have you heard of it, regulatory affairs officer? Recently there has been a disturbance in the Night Kingdom. I heard that many vampires have left and escaped to the Western Peninsula."

The older regulatory affairs officer nodded, his expression was cold and callous. "The temple has already sent people to investigate."

"But considering it is the Western Peninsula, Sunset Temple's power is stronger than ours, Sunrise Temple's, right?" The younger man stared at the regulatory affairs officer, who seemed to seal his mouth shut on the matter, and probed. "I heard that people of the Western Peninsula could live in peace with vampires and werewolves. The Sunset Temple also abstained from hunting the creatures of the underworld. Could our people move about freely under Sunset Temple's power?"

The regulatory affairs officer lifted his head and looked at him coldly.

"Why do you think our world is named 'Errol'?"

"Hah? I saw that when I was learning our language." The young Sunrise Temple priest scratched his head. "Errol is the Holy Sun God. He controls the sunrise and sunset, and decides the origin of all creatures. Is it not the reason why our world is named Errol?"

The Sunrise regulatory affairs officer snorted and smiled mysteriously. "You were sent to guard the patterned seal, but you do not have the rights to read our historic records, which is why you only know about these facts."

The young priest's face was full of longing and curiosity.

"Originally, our world was not named Errol. It was only after the Battle of Eradication that the name was changed to Errol."

The regulatory affairs officer said quietly.

"After that horrendous battle, which almost ruined the world, the Holy Sun God, Errol, sacrificed himself. Otherwise, the outcome would not be as simple as the world being split into two peninsulas.

"Since then, the world was named after Errol in order to commemorate the Holy Sun God, his sacrifice, and his heroic move to save the world."

The young priest widened his eyes in shock. "So, it was those disasters that led the Holy Sun God from the legends to—"

The regulatory affairs officer raised his hand without any emotion on his face and cut

off the priest's rhetorical question before he continued, "Within the ashes of the Holy Sun, two gods succeeded his radiance, and rose up anew."

The young priest seemed to understand something as his jaw dropped open.

"That's right, Sunrise Lord and Sunset Goddess once governed the Holy Sun together as a single entity."

The regulatory affairs officer's eyes were glinting with ice and frost.

"The Holy Sun shines upon all creatures. How is there any difference?

"Can Sunrise's priest move around in Sunset's range? That is the answer."

But the regulatory affairs officer added one more sentence in his heart while he stared at the elated priest.

'Of course, at least that was what we thought.

'As for Sunset... '

At this moment, the ruined and gloomy building suddenly shook!

Dust was falling off the tumbling stone pillars.

Both of their expressions changed at that moment!

'No way.'

They leapt onto their feet and ran desperately as well as vigilantly towards the center of the building.

"Prepare the message candles and do not be stingy on using them!" The regulatory affairs officer yelled as if he was facing a formidable enemy!

"Prepare yourself for the worst in tackling this sort of evil!"

They had reached their destination.

A weird picture had been drawn using peculiar paint on the stone floor of the

uttermost center of the dark and gloomy building.

The picture was a roughly ten-meter wide circle with weird and bizarre formulas and letters on it. The innermost center of the circle was a drawing of a six-fingered black claw.

The shaking was still going on.

The young priest's eyes were filled with confusion as he put away the white candle with gold patterns that was in his palm.

He furrowed his brows and said, "The sealing rune is still in good condition. It has not struggled loose."

However, the regulatory affairs officer was still highly vigilant. As he felt the vibration, he turned around with a serious expression and asked, "But what just happened? This type of shaking..."

The young priest seemed to remember something as he pulled out an ancient, black book from his bosom in a flurry. He hastily flipped to a page and read it out with much difficulty.

"Unfathomable shaking... unfathomable shaking... Ah, got it! It is right here!"

But after the priest read for a while, he immediately lifted his head up and stared at the regulatory affairs officer, perplexed.

The regulatory affairs officer asked unpleasantly, "What? You are the only one here who went through the complete training of the Ancient Empire's language!"

"No... According to what is written in this notebook, the occasional agitation of the seal is very normal."

The young priest furrowed his brows and continued, "But... the sudden activity of the sun, the tide of the moon, the changes of the flow in hell's river, or the Seven Kings of Hell picking their noses or yawning, the Kingdom of All Gods deciding to remodel their bedrooms when they are free... God, what are all these disrespectful terms... A number of supreme class experts passing by, could result in the sealed being's name being called by many people at the same time. These are the possible causes for the fluctuation of energy and the agitation of life... The degree of severity is not the

same..."

The priest flipped through the notebook and sighed helplessly under the thundering sound caused by the shaking.

"God, I am so done with these wizards. For a single question, there are six to seven different requirements and more than twenty possible answers. And there is a 'to be continued' label at the end of the writing. What is the difference with not finding an answer? No wonder they became extinct."

"There should be something that has the highest possibility of happening. Are we just going to disregard this matter?" the regulatory affairs officer asked as he forced down his anger.

The young priest fumbled through the pages of the notebook in a hurry, his eyebrows tightly furrowed together.

"I do not know. I am just a third-grade white robe priest of the Sunrise Temple... I am not..."

At this moment, the shaking suddenly halted.

Both of them raised their heads and exchanged a glance. They could see confusion and relief in each other's eyes.

The shaking did not come back again.

The regulatory affairs officer heaved a sigh of relief then, glared fiercely at the priest before he turned around and left.

The priest looked at the regulatory affairs officer's back and continued his speech in a tone that indicated that he was wronged.

"...I am not an extinct wizard or witch... who knows about everything and can use a variety of methods to make sense of everything..."

The regulatory affairs officer spoke without turning his head, "You should be glad that they are all dead!"

His voice was full of anger.

The priest, whom the regulatory affairs officer had vented his anger upon, glanced at the six-fingered black claw and rolled his eyes.

"If those wizards are not dead..." The regulatory affairs officer's figure disappeared behind the stone pillar, but his annoyed voice still made its way over.

"Would a rookie like you have a chance in guarding the sealing rune over here?"

'Of course I would not have the chance to be here if the wizards are not extinct... But...'

The young priest raised his eyebrows and glanced at the circle on the ground with the corner of his eye before he shook his head and held up his palms helplessly.

'What a joke.'



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